monogram

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why Hollywood

EDITORIAL

"... and Macdonald hated meaninglessness
even more than the war in Vietnam."

Norman Mailer, Armies of the Night

In the family circle of the arts, the cinema is treated as the enfant sauvage: attractive, but without a doubt mentally subnormal. Nothing reflects this more clearly than film-journalism. Cinema City, colour supplements, weekend reviews, tv-lineups - so many ways of ignoring the cinema by systematically overexposing the trivial periphery, and leaving the centre, the actual films, in total darkness. Whatever its intentions, the glamourizing of King Kong's hair-piece, of the first cinemascope lens, or Ruby Keeler's shoes, not only transforms, for example, Hollywood into a museum of moth-eaten bric-a-brac with a phoney camp appeal, it also panders to a vague feeling that the cinema in general is of no great consequence.

For that reason even today, after Ford has become a household name, and Losey a respected Englishman, after Bergman has entered conversation as a suitable piece of small-talk, and Godard has provoked the nearest thing to an intellectual debate on the cinema in this country, films are still a "terrain vague", an uncharted no-man's land in the cultural landscape. They are produced and consumed in a jealously maintained intellectual vacuum, and what there is of a more serious discussion has all the uptight irritability of criticism vegetating in a ghetto.

Among those who call themselves educated, in particular, the cinema fares much worse than, say, the theatre - perhaps because showing more overtly and inescapably than either literature or the visual arts to what extent it is also an industry, it raises certain awkward aesthetic problems: for example, it constantly exposes the flaws in the elitist conception of artistic creation; and being dominated by frankly economic considerations, it is deprived of the social and intellectual status which "art" commands as a matter of course. Instead, it lives in the cultural thicket that passes for entertainment, and in which only the ever-hungry eye of the sociologist is permitted to roam. Yet precisely because its ideological function is less disguised, the cinema serves as an important reminder of the ideological element in all artistic production. This ambiguous pluralism, the essential impurity of the cinema in the realm of the expressive arts, is a permanent challenge to a critic's powers of discrimination, an irritant to his sense of values. Moreover, it forces him to declare his aesthetic criteria, and to explain his cultural or political presuppositions.

With all too few exceptions, British film-criticism, however, has preferred to ignore such implications. Given the present situation of a rising interest in the actual production of films, it has, for example, failed to mediate between the expectations and assumptions of the cinema-going public and the intentions and talents of that creative minority which in the past and today has made the cinema worthy of such interest. As a result, no other critical idiom is at once so confused and inconsistent, so eclectic and yet embroiled in misunderstandings, as the language of the cinema.

It was from a sense of apprehension, a feeling that the cinema, both creatively and critically, may continue to remain ignorant of itself, that we began, something over twenty issues ago, to write about films in the Brighton Film Review. That others elsewhere felt like us, was apparent not only from the comparative success of our initially modest venture, but also from the emergence of several other independent publications at about the same time, some of comparable, some of divergent aims. We freely admitted our personal preferences - the Hollywood cinema of the 40s, 50s and early 60s - and acknowledged our debt to French film-criticism in this respect, and to the pioneering work which Movie had done in England.

*

The greatest difficulty which stands in the way of a widely disseminated and active cinematic culture, still remains the chronic inaccessibility of the films themselves, whether old or new. Timidity of the distributors and the precarious economic position of independent cinemas is one reason, but the indifference of certain national institutions, set up to provide the basis for such a culture, but often less than adequate to the task, is also to blame. The critical activity in the last two years, the renewed interest in the cinema as a social and artistic phenomenon has undoubtedly made an impact on the distribution habits, on television programming and on National Film Theatre policy. But this pressure has to be maintained, and possibly intensified - as well as diversified.

MONOGRAM's basic aim is therefore to extend the work done in the Brighton Film Review, to investigate the main cinematic tradition as we see it, and to define at least one possible approach to the cinema as a whole, by a careful attention to the actual films being made today, whether commerical or independent, and to re-assess outstanding and interesting works of the past. But we shall also be dealing with neglected areas or under-estimated figures of cinema history, and while we are committed to *spelling out our critical principles and to formulating a coherent "policy"*, we are not a theoretical magazine, nor are we persuaded that a particular political commitment will necessarily dispose of, or resolve, certain fundamental aesthetic problems: this means, among other things, that concerning evaluation and meaning, we will take a film on its own terms and respect its particular frame of reference. Nonetheless, this attention to practice as against theory will continue to involve us to a certain extent with the commercial American cinema, partly because of its quantitative predominance, and partly because of its stylistic, thematic and ideological consistency which has given it an extraordinarily high level of individual and collective achievement, an achievement peculiarly linked to the often appalling conditions of economic exploitation and creative unfreedom.

By defending Hollywood movies as in many ways exemplary, we are not claiming that they are inherently a superior form of film-making, nor that the Hollywood aesthetic is the only possible one. What we are insisting on is that the cinema, in spite of its comparative youth and novelty does have a tradition, and that this tradition is to a large part constituted by the American cinema. And like every art, however public and commercial, the cinema derives its complexity and richness not only from its relation to felt and experienced "life" - a difficult quantity to assess at best - but also from the internal relation to the development and history of the medium.

This second relation is MONOGRAM's chief concern, for we believe that the cinema of the future can hardly be the major form of artistic and social expression (a position which it us undoubtedly capable of) without being to some extent comprehensible within this tradition, which is not even primarily one of how films are being made, but a simple fact of cinematic consumption, of what kind of films we have been brought up on. This may sound reactionary, but isn't: to ignore the American cinema is aesthetically as harmful and potentially damaging as consciously repressing childhood experiences because one cannot come to terms with them: both acts are likely to lead to psychoses and obsessive private fantasies. A healthy attitude, on the other hand, doesn't mean one has to re-enact these experiences ad infinitum.

"Legibility" within the tradition therefore includes for us the critical attitude to the American cinema of a Godard, as well as the more or less subtle links which directors like Truffaut, Chabrol and even Bunuel maintain with the great American directors. Those it doesn't include are the faux-naifs - both underground and above ground, who pretend, for reasons best known to themselves, that the cinema hadn't even been invented before they came along. Such an attitude, once described as the "desperate myth of an iconic adamism", is essentially a rearguard action, and although there are aesthetic as well as political and social reasons for the emergence of cinematic primitivism, and a strategic value of some importance in the implicit protest of all artistic minimalism, this shouldn't blind one to the necessary distinction between what is creative expression of a dilemma, and what is merely its symptom.

Of course, it would be foolish were we to pretend that there is only one way of making movies, or indeed, only one way of seeing them. More and more people are learning to handle a ciné-camera - as a profession, an artistic vocation, an instrument in political propaganda or as a means of self-expression. There is, of course, nothing reprehensible about this, and such developments testify if anything to a willingness for experimentation and personal initiative which confirms the cinema's direct and perennial fascination - an indispensable condition for its continuity. But in spite of a virtually universal appeal and increasing technical simplicity, the cinema in the sense that we understand it, as a primarily narrative medium, is a very demanding form of communication, which exonerates neither maker nor critic from holding certain artistic standards. Only if films are brought into an intellectual contact with other films as well as with other aspects of culture can such standards be made meaningful, and if necessary, revised.

Thus, MONOGRAM does not intend to specialize exclusively on the classical cinema. There simply will be a tendency to look at contemporary cinema with aesthetic premises which have been elaborated in the context of the American cinema. If this is a limitation, we accept it as such, and we hope that our restriction in scope will allow us to make up for it in depth and clarity of argument. If there is any single point which unites the contributors to MONOGRAM, it is their belief in the cinema, its relevance and excellence, both past and present. Such a faith is nourished not by a sense of professional obligation, of a job to be done, nor because we are somehow addicted to spending large portions of our waking life in artificially darkened rooms;

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the american cinema

I. a critical statement

▲ Henry Fonda in Fritz Lang's YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE

As film-critics, we ought to be committed, at the very least, to two distinct propositions: that cinema is a serious and important form of artistic expression and that any argument for its significance must take full cognizance of the practise of the American cinema. In other words that, for the critic, Hollywood is the great fact to be reckoned with, but not solely in terms of sheer output but in terms of the cinematic creativity which it wittingly or unwittingly fostered. That, within this context, there was produced a large body of work deserving of recognition, serious attention and analysis, which, for the most part, it has still to receive. Further, that, if anything, it is the American cinema that sets the standards against which the European art cinema is to be judged and not vice versa.

In practise there is no pressing need to justify these opinions. For most people in England and in France who read film magazines take the importance of cinema in general and of the American cinema in particular for granted. And on the whole the case that we wish to make can be most successfully argued through the analysis of specific films or through discussions of particular directors - as we have already done in the *Brighton Film Review* and as we intend to continue to do in the future. Nevertheless, the founding of a new magazine does provide both the opportunity and the incentive to make explicit certain inclinations and assumptions, to improvise a makeshift framework - to be modified, extended or discarded - for a continuing debate.

As for the cultural inferiority of the movies this emerges as a consideration to be taken account of only because patronising the movies continues to be the approved elite cultural stance in both England and America - curiously it is even more prevalent there than here. What is odd is that this attitude requires so little justification: an opinionizing backed only by the flourishing of approved cultural credentials. Robert Warshow and Pauline Kael are representative. Warshow wrote:

> "There is great need, I think, for a criticism of "popular culture" which can acknowledge its pervasive and disturbing power without ceasing to be aware of the superior claims of higher arts, and yet without a bad conscience."

But Pauline Kael frankly confessed to cinematic original sin:

> "Who at some point hasn't set out dutifully for that fine foreign film and then ducked into the nearest piece of American trash? For we're not only educated people of taste but common people with common feelings. And our common feelings aren't all **bad**."

To begin with, we note the built-in assumptions. How could "the higher arts" fail to have "superior claims"? And who could question the alliteration which establishes the equivalence of foreignness and fineness? The antithesis here is no accident but an all-embracing aesthetic distinction. For Warshow and Kael are clearly puritans and they are perfectly clear that literature appeals to their better nature, the movies to their baser instincts. And after reading them, it is tempting to conclude that the "disassociation of sensibility" is not so much a crisis of the 17th century as a characteristic of contemporary bourgeois life, in which the need to pay lip service to an ideal of high culture conflicts with a desire to slum it with the masses. Needless to say, opinions, prejudices that are merely affirmed require no refutation - it is only necessary to show them for what they are.

Nevertheless, the achievement of the American cinema is something that calls for explanation in view of the enormous obstacles, handicaps and pressures that confronted the artist at every turn. If there was access to unrivalled facilities and generous finance, the price which had to be paid for them was often exorbitantly high: the necessity of working with unsuitable scripts and stars, while subject to constant interference from above, the liability of being taken off a project or of having one's work mutilated in the cutting room. It was difficult for the director to retain his self-respect let alone his artistic integrity. The only possibility was to do good by stealth. For the artist in Hollywood, to characterise, in general, the desperation of his predicament, the words of Dencombe in Henry James' story *The Middle Years* are unusually apposite:

> "We work in the dark - we do what we can - we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."

For art, in Hollywood, was a madness indeed.

The Star System ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

The star system is normally associated with all that is most shallow and meretricious in the American cinema and if we talk less about stars than was once the case this is regarded as a distinct intellectual advance. And yet stars are one of the great strengths of the American cinema. For the use of the star always implies openness and potentiality, while even the best character acting implies the closing off of possibilities, the straitjacket of a fixed role. In the theatre, traditions of character acting have constantly impeded the development of the drama - Shaw pointed out that it was almost impossible to give adequate performances of Ibsen because the actors interpreted their parts as if they were performing in conventional well-made plays. The European cinema has laboured under similar handicaps and it is relevant that it has only achieved authentic forms of expression through the use of amateurs (Bresson, Rossellini) or by relying on certain actors who have been able to participate in the creation of an appropriate style (Bergman, Godard, Antonioni). Yet this latter group has certainly learnt the lessons of the American cinema.

Georg Lukacs characterised capitalist society as

> "a society so contradictory that it on the one hand gave birth to the ideal of the complete human personality and on the other hand destroyed it in practise"

American society most acutely embodies this contradiction. It is the star who exemplifies this ideal of the complete human personality, even when he or she is placed in the most unpropitious circumstances. For example, in Frank Borzage's *DESIRE* Gary Cooper is a car salesman but he is not **only** a car salesman, he is Gary Cooper. As such he is the equal of anyone. Again Lukacs can be invoked - for he has shown how, in the novel the **typical** hero was replaced by one who was merely **average**. Gary Cooper is typical in this higher sense: he represents universal human potentiality rather than simply mediocrity. In the films of Walsh the star, the hero represents an ideal of completeness, and he is deliberately contrasted with a bourgeois antitype who exemplifies the negation of these values. The rapport which the star establishes with an audience precludes easy moral judgement, forces the spectator to enter into conflicts and tensions. The character is only notionally given - he defines himself through his behaviour and his actions. We witness him choosing what he is to be.

Values - Ideology ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

The American cinema can be regarded as having its own distinctive value system and as having thematic preoccupations which are not confined to a particular genre or auteur. The stress on the individual as individual (a function of the star system) is further particularised into the delineation of a hero who is essentially free, floating and uncommitted. Like Cooper's Leatherstocking he operates on the margins and borders of civilisation. The respect he wins from others is based in large measure on his resourcefulness, competence and technical expertise. He is self-reliant and his involvement in collective projects is invariably shown as disinterested and seldom based on self-interest or the desire for gain (Tom Doniphon in *THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE*). Yet at the same time, such involvement has the character of pure self-expression. It is not strictly ethical, even when it appears to be so. For there is a strong vein of anarchic individualism running through the American Cinema. The hero is greedy for experience and what he builds is for himself alone - for his own satisfaction. His objective is to dominate, to master, to impose his will upon a recalcitrant reality. He is not concerned with values and rewards of social existence (Mann's aborted *CIMARRON*) and if he cannot find justice within a social context he looks for it outside it (Mann, Lang). All the major genres focus on a conflict between the individual and an objective world. In the Western the hero's desire to impose a pattern is legitimised because it coincides with the needs of society, in the crime picture it becomes taboo because it conflicts with them. In comedy and the musical the struggle is more agonising - the failure of a recalcitrant world to accept the hero's own image of himself is both painful and funny. Similarly the American war picture tends to focus more on conflicts between the individual and military authority, among G.I.s themselves than on the struggle against the enemy. Here the aggressiveness and violence of anarchic individuals can be harnessed to a good cause - in this sense the war film can be regarded as a synthesis of the crime picture and the Western.

These considerations suggest that it may be more fruitful to think of the American cinema as a totality and to study mutations and transformationg within that rather than to work solely within the concept to genre - to work across genres by relating, say, *HIGH SIERRA to COLORADO TERRITORY*, not only on the basis that both are the work of Walsh, but by also considering how Walsh's concern with the heroic individual is related to that of Hawks and by asking how far this can be regarded as characteristic of the cinema of the forties. Equally relevant would be an examination of the treatment of vengeance in the American cinema relating the work of Mann and Lang to that of other directors. Without this wider perspective attempts to define 'auteur' genre will be simultaneously too vague and too narrow.

Mise en Scène ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

From the producer's point of view the director in Hollywood was little more than an assembler of readymades - stars, scenery, plot, costumes. Yet this narrowness, this apparent lack of scope constituted a great challenge. Minnelli's reaction is characteristic:

> "I am always ready to take on a subject that might seem alien to me, to look for things below the surface."

The richness of the American cinema stems from this differentiation and integration of levels. Frequently the very incongruity of the materials with which the director is presented can be a source of complexity enabling him to establish tensions and discordances that are both gripping and

disturbing. Uncertainty in the cinema is a great weapon, even though it can be easily vulgarised and abused. But the cinema already suggests that the conception of the completely homogenous and unified artwork will have to fall - and not only in the cinema but in other arts as well. For the European art cinema is one-dimensional (in its very homogeneity) and reality either annihilates interpretation (Italian neo-realism) or the reality is itself annihilated by the weight of interpretation brought to bear on it. The depth and detail of American mise en scene puts most European films to shame. Yet it is characteristic that Minnelli, referring to his use of mirrors in *MADAME BOVARY*, should have to state "it is a recurring image that nobody noticed." The "sophistication" of cinema criticism was for too long such that it only noticed symbols when they were ostentatiously pointed out as such, that it could only recognise as art things which were labelled as such.

In this sense, a commitment to the essentially heterogeneous and diversified character of the American cinema has its own radical implications. It may well prove to be a commitment to a wholly new kind of aesthetics.

David MORSE

Jerry Lewis : are the '70 s his last chance to become a great Hollywood director ?

the american cinema

2. why Hollywood

In a recent Canadian underground movie, the director at the end makes a kind of appeal. He calls on his fellow-filmmakers and presumably his audience, to - I quote from memory - "destroy the cinematic form, so that falling snow is once again falling snow and nothing else."

This seems to me an interesting proposition in several respects. Above all, as I understand it, it is a rallying cry against the commercial cinema, and in particular the American cinema, whose use of falling snow, especially when studio-produced, is simply judged to be part of a debased, sentimentalizing rhetoric. For once, the case against Hollywood - however cryptic - is made not in terms of the economic terrorism imposed by studio-contracts and package deals, *nor the censured and prohibited subjects, nor creative* unfreedom and monopolized distribution methods but instead phrased as an objection based on genuinely aesthetic principles. In protesting against a certain "pathetic fallacy", the appeal tries to challenge the way in which physical reality figures in the traditional American movie. And thus by implication, it contests an entire approach to the representative and mimetic potential of the cinematic image, as it has been practiced, with on the whole increasing but not unlimited sophistication, during the last 50 years of film-history.

That a critical analysis of filmic language can be a meaningful artistic exercise is not in question. Godard was not the first director to make films which are also commentaries on their own genesis and which offer their own critique. But the destruction of certain formal conventions does not make the cinema automatically - or even in the long run - an instrument in future social struggles.

Perhaps what the Canadian film-maker wanted to say was simply: destroy Hollwood because its movies have a form whose ideological content I do not like. Let's create a form whose ideological content I do like. And this ideological content implies that falling snow looks like falling snow. Although I personally am not looking forward to this

type of cinema, I recognize one of its theoretical premisses, namely that a particular form may contain assumptions which are neither purely aesthetic nor morally neutral. The problems raised by the anti-Hollywood lobby are therefore not without interest. But the critics who yesterday argued in the name of a cultural élitism, and the ideologues of today on the extreme left have one thing in common: neither group has ever been unduly concerned with trying to understand Hollywood as an aesthetic phenomenon in its own right. This would seem to be, however, a precondition of judging its aesthetic merit as well as its social function. As I see it, every form of cinema poses two problems of a general nature. Firstly, what one might call the 'reality-status' of the images which a film - **any** film, projects; and secondly, the relation that exists between a given artistic *form and the kind of truth* it implicitly or explicitly articulates. That both these aspects are particularly relevant to a discussion of Hollywood - on the one hand despised for being a dream-factory, i.e. for being unreal in artistic terms, and on the other attacked for its mystification on ideological grounds - must appear obvious.

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When in the following, I speak of the American cinema, or the classic tradition, I intend to refer above all to the films of the 40s, 50s and early to mid-60s. This may be an arbitrary restriction, and although imposed partly by my own personal preferences, I nonetheless feel it to be a particularly representative period. It comprises Hollywood at a time when the major technical innovations - sound, colour, cinemascope - had for the most part already become assimilated as integral parts of the expressive capacities of the cinema. For the period under consideration, the filmic language evolved by Griffith, Stroheim and Murnau still retained its validity as the syntactical basis, whatever its modifications in terms of sound-effects, montage and camera-movements (such as dolly, crane and deep-focus). This tradition embraces on the one hand the best work of the second-line directors, Wellman, Siegel, Dwan, Tourneur, Oswald, Wyler, Daves, etc., and among the great directors, includes the work of Ford, Vidor, Walsh, Cukor, Minnelli, Preminger, Sirk, Losey, Ray, Mann, Boetticher and others.

The list, however, is not infinite. There comes a level in the American production, where no aesthetic seriousness or artistic purpose is discernible, though even below that level, there is still a huge number of films not devoid of interest. At the other - top end - of the scale, I consider that Sternberg, Welles, Hitchcock, Lang, and to a lesser degree, Hawks, have produced films, which for a variety of reasons, fall outside the mainstream as I see it. This does not mean that *PSYCHO, FURY* or *RED RIVER* are incomprehensible within the framework of the traditional American cinema - far from it - but what makes these films exceptional, lies more in the directors' personalities, their vision of the cinema, than in the technical and expressive means which they share with others. One might say that the great directors within the tradition, have created and formulated the standards for their fields and genres - for example, Ford Mann and Boetticher dominating the Western in the 50s; Minnelli and Donen giving shape to the musical; Walsh specializing in the adventure film and making some of the best gangster movies; Leo McCarey, then Tashlin and above all Cukor defining the potential of the comedy; Preminger, Cukor, Sirk and Minnelli together exploring most successfully the melodrama in colour and scope.

The other group, except for Hawks and Lang, have created their own genres, and with them, their own standards. But they all have in common a far more explicitly intellectual, analytic approach to the medium, in which the tradition is reflected only obliquely, or reformulated altogether. This, however, does not mean that their films are categorically better than those produced by the mainstream, nor that all their films are good. It means that in order to do justice to their work, one has to shift one's critical perspective, as one has to, in each case, for

Lauren Bacall Rock Hudson Robert Stack in Douglas Sirk's WRITTEN ON THE WIND

Bunuel, Godard, Bergman or Antonioni. On the whole, therefore, my generalizations deal with only a tiny minority of the overall production of Hollywood. Perhaps as little as one per cent of its total output deserves serious critical discussion, but this leaves anything between 200 and 300 great films, which is more than one could claim about the production of all other countries taken together, and is a singular achievement in any art.

The most fundamental problem which the critic of the American cinema encounters is that he has to find criteria by which a) to describe a certain, on the whole remarkably homogeneous practice of the cinema, to describe the way American films **work**, and b) to find criteria which can evaluate, that is, distinguish among a vast and amorphous body of films, those that reach the level of an artistic statement. As a result, there have been a limited number of essentially related problems, which serious film-criticism in the last ten years has tried to define in relation to Hollywood. Briefly, there is a) the question of authorship, of who in the last resort is responsible for the aesthetic qualities of a film; b) the question of genre, that is, in what sense and to what extent are American films dependent on the established conventions and the iconography of certain genres - the western, the gangster movie, the musical, the war-film, the comedy, the melodrama, etc.; c) what kind of visual language, if any, does the American cinema represent, that is, how does it use cinematic images in a formalized discourse. And lastly, in what social and cultural context does the American cinema operate - does it reflect social reality or mystify it, and does it present a purely emotional appeal to its audience?

Obviously, it is impossible to go into all these questions in detail, or even to summarize the debate as it now stands. What I would like to do, is to reformulate some of these questions in terms of minimal conditions which seem to me to apply to the vast majority of Hollywood films, and which would allow one to determine more clearly a movie's aesthetic merit. I am aware that this may sound suspiciously like an attempt to define a normative aesthetic, where everything that does not fit the proposed categories is rejected. I can only hope that by dealing with a particular period, and a body of already existing film, I am not unduly speculative about the future of the cinema in general or trying to construct an ideal film. However, my view is that a "good" film is a form of visual communication that possesses coherence, and a purpose, which can be discovered, described and assessed. In other words, if a film is meaningful, it can be shown to be so. But as Roland Barthes pointed out: the purport of a work of art is to put sense in the world, not a sense. The question is, therefore how do we discover what kinds of sense there are implied in an American movie. Basically, I am trying to find out what elements contribute towards aesthetic unity in a Hollywood picture of the period under discussion; what use does it make of reality; what types of aesthetic pleasure or satisfaction does it offer; what ideology does it reflect, and how does it validate this ideology artistically?

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The American cinema is organized along fairly precisely calculated lines, which are on the one hand, economic, and on the other, social and cultural. I am here only concerned with the latter, though both are evidently interrelated. Two things characterize this American cinema most distinctly: Firstly, it is an exclusively **narrative** cinema, that is, its prima facie concern is with telling a story, to analyse in fictional terms certain human situations and experiences. Its structural constants are dramatic conflict and narrative progression. Without these, no Hollywood movie would ever leave the cutting-room.

Secondly, it is a **psychological** cinema. This notion is difficult to explain (one might also say, borrowing Brecht's terminology, it is Aristotelian and not epic), but what it means in its simplest form is that a film can, and should, for 90-odd minutes, hold an audience's undivided and sympathetic attention. Louis B. Mayer allegedly judged films by whether his bottom started to ache before the lights went on again or not. In his habitually crude way, the chief of MGM thereby indicated that a good movie, one that he was putting his money on, should activate certain psychological processes - of identification, of emotive participation or imaginative projection, and that these processes constitute part of the aesthetic meaning of a film, and fall within the control of those who make it. I know that these are elementary points, but they are easily forgotten. To what extent this psychological-narrative structure characterizes the American cinema idealogically as a bourgeois cinema, I shall leave to others, better qualified than myself, to discuss.

One of the consequences which I draw from the fact that the traditional Hollywood movie is narrative and psychological is that it excludes certain other categories of film-making, and thus renders largely irrelevant such aesthetic criteria as have been formulated for the documentary, the didactic tract, whether scientific or political, the home movie, whether shown to friends or in a cinema, cine-verite and experimental cinema. It also distinguishes itself from the cinema of ideas, whether of the type produced by Pasolini, or that which Godard is now trying to practice.

Once one has defined what kind of cinema it isn't, perhaps one can agree about the critical terminology which might be most appropriate to the object under consideration. For example, I personally believe that neither the philosophical-phenomenological vocabulary used by Bazin nor the concepts of structural anthropology or of linguistics and information theory can be applied directly. If one has to choose a certain terminology, I would say that given the dual characteristics of narrative and psychological, literature and music seem to me the most comparable fields. I think one can be more specific and say that what corresponds perhaps closest to the aesthetic experience and artistic form of the great Hollywood movie in the 50s and 60s - all proportions guarded - is fiction, as exemplified by the C19th novels, whether romantic, realist or naturalistic. Regarding the depiction of character, the relation of people to their environment, the dramatic devices and plot-construction, the American cinema owes a great deal to the work of Scott, Balzac, Dickens, Tolstoy and even Zola. In other respects, however, notably its overall structure, its semantic pattern, its duration in time, its emotive effect and dramatic line, its elements of audience participation, the movie approaches rather more romantic and post-romantic music, say, that of Berlioz, Bruckner or Wagner. This analogy is obviously not intended as a value judgement, implying that *MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN* equals *Les Illusions Perdues,* or that a Preminger movie is worth a Bruckner symphony. I merely want to draw attention to some aesthetic features of the American cinema which hitherto have been neglected in the general debate.

The most relevant implication of the parallel with music is the shift from overt content of a film, to an appreciation where the subject can be seen as only one element in a more formalized kind of discourse. That we are dealing with a formalized discourse has been recognized by almost all cinema-criticism. For example, when we speak of the "conventions" of a genre, we are alluding to a film's stylization and codification of dramatic elements and visual details. It seems to me, however, that this phenomenon extends beyond, and indeed across the genres, as a general characteristic of the American cinema. Perhaps partly owing to its nature as an industry, Hollywood has always aimed at a certain optimum degree of conformity in the methods and means of production. Writing a script seems often a question of assembling in different, but recognizable combinations a given number of common or near-identical elements - of subject, situation or character. But this affects mainly the structure, not necessarily the significance of the finished film. More importantly, stylization implies that given images or sequences, rather than playing any explicitly denotative or even connotative role in the dramatic progression, can nonetheless have a more or less precise "melodic" function, in giving the narrative its inner rhythm and organic vibrations. (It will depend on the spectator's own sensibility whether he can distinguish between the rhythm in a Minnelli and the heavy-handed rhetorical padding of a David Lean).

The analogy with fiction, on the other hand, is meant to draw attention to the function of a middle-of-the-road character as a mediating consciousness, to the relation between fictional structure and realism, and lastly, to the connexions between the dramatization of a certain world and the analysis of a given society.

Both analogies, however, ought to prevent too literal or unreflective an interpretation of a Hollywood movie in terms of its story-line, and induce the critic to seek individuality, aesthetic qualities and moral significance (if such it has to have), not primarily in the intellectually analyzable material content, but elsewhere as well - in such things as the dramatic pattern, as it emerges from the successive conflicts between characters, the creation and manipulation of visual space, the rhythm of the action, its climaxes in relation to its temps morts (an extreme, and therefore perhaps not altogether successful example is the dramatic rhythm of Peckinpah's *THE WILD BUNCH*, which presents a succession of anti-climaxes suspended between two highly over-charged, formalized dramatic climaxes), the purpose of a director's audience-manipulation (Hitchcock's notorious remark that he played on the spectators' emotions in *PSYCHO* like a pianist plays his keyboard). Other significant elements are of course the camera-movements - Lang's tracking-out from a close-up to relate a detail or a character to his environment, the way Nicholas Ray signalizes an inner conflict of a character by unbalancing the architectural composition of the frame, Preminger's pans, Fuller's track-in - track-out sequences, Mann's and Boetticher's crane-shots, Sirk's use of vertical movements in a moral context - each of these directors has a particular, though in its means not necessarily wholly exclusive manner of dramatizing and at the same time interpreting a situation - unobtrusively and above all, integrated into the narrative itself. Furthermore, there is a director's handling of the 'persona' of a star - Hawks' and Ford's use of John Wayne, Wilder's use of Marilyn Monroe in *SOME LIKE IT HOT* - undercutting or reinforcing pre-established expectations, in order to convey the better certain themes. All these elements are meant when we talk about a director's mise-en-scene, and it does imply that the form of the film, now understood to include the mise-en-scene, i.e. the various modes of **how** a film signifies - is logically prior to, and hence inseparable from **what** is being signified and communicated.

It also means that as a critical audience, we have to attain a certain level of abstraction, and to learn to see significant units where previously we had the impression of repetition, obtuseness, lack of sensibility, moral ineptitude and random assembly. Of course this is a dangerous recipe to advocate, because there is a lot of repetition, obtuseness etc. around in the cinema, and it would be patently absurd though alas not unthinkable, to pretend that every put-together B-feature by Michael Curtiz, Burt Kennedy or even Roger Corman, and every epic fiasco by a Stevens, Frankenheimer or Mankiewicz must eo ipso have the kind of coherence of a Ford, or the diversity of meaning of a Hitchcock or Lang.

Such excesses of the *auteur* theory are only avoidable if the hunt for themes in a director's work is supplemented by a careful investigation of the thematic constants in the American cinema as a whole, and if the zeal for detecting an individual directorial style, is matched by a thorough knowledge of other directorial styles, and if in general the search for meaning is more evenly spread over criteria other than themes and lastly, if not everything that is merely interesting, is immediately claimed to be profound.

And although I have spoken of a certain level of abstraction I might add that this does not mean an "intellectualization" of the American cinema, but rather the reverse, namely a way of talking intelligibly about precisely the non-intellectual aspects of an American movie and their aesthetic significance.

For even among the more serious critics and *auteur* theorists, there is a tendency to see the progression of a theme, whether in an individual film, or within the entire work of a director, too intellectually and abstractly, as the development of a moral argument, whose main purpose it is to act as a kind of philosophical commentary on life in general. There may be directors whose themes do show a progression, and whose work constitutes a 'philosophy of life' - Fritz Lang is perhaps the most obvious candidate - but to posit it as a kind of a-priori or to assume it implicitly, seems to me to be highly misleading, and it lands the critic in a straight-jacket entirely of his own making.

As a general rule, in order to judge what an American movie is worth, one ought to have - other than one's senses - some idea of the relation in which the form stands to subject and themes, which of course implies that one can also recognize those instances - even in good films - where a theme is only partially visualized on the screen, or a conception only imperfectly translated into action. Or again those cases, where there is, interference - be it from the producer, from a bad screenplay, unsuitable actors, or a director's apparent inability to warm to his assignment.

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In this context, it is pertinent to ask oneself whether a good film need necessarily always have a personal style. *Auteur* critics in the past often accepted this as a matter of course, though it creates the wellknown problem of the good film made by an otherwise undistinguished director. Instead of talking about a personal style which belongs to a particular director, one perhaps ought rather to speak of a film's specific style, which means theoretically, a good film will invariably reflect a specific approach of the mise-en-scene to its theme, and show evidence that the material has been worked in specifically cinematic terms. Such an approach may sometimes owe more to the conventions of a genre, the flair of a particular studio and crew, or to a felicitous adaptation of a well-constructed screenplay, but it will always need a competent or inspired director, though not necessarily a directorial personality.

Richard Fleischer's *VIOLENT SATURDAY* is an excellent example of a film which triumphs by its extraordinary functional mise-en-scene and where technical brilliance and a certain visual efficiency imposes itself far more strongly than Fleischer's individuality as an auteur. Indeed, the attraction of the 50s B-picture is the extraordinarily terse and compact way in which the best of them manage to tell their story. As such they are object-lessons in the art of the cinematic narrative, and demonstrate how in Hollywood sheer technical competence - often by a skilful use of editing techniques and montage effects - could body forth its own themes and moral attitudes. The sense of fatalism, of inevitability and of apocalyptic despair which characterizes the thriller in the late forties and fifties, with its aura of black romanticism, pervasive corruption, and its cynical drive for self-destruction, is as much the consequence of a montage-based type of visual logic (whose causality operates on the 'post ergo propter' principle) as it is due to glistening back-streets at night, fawn raincoats and sinister looking men in hats. Such values a director endorsed along with the assignment of a project, and at that time, the conjunction of genre and high-productivity rate put a great number of pre-defined elements - formal, pictorial, thematic - at a director's disposal, leaving him to exercise his talents of observation, of visual imagination within a strictly limited, but flexible frame of reference. Working in Hollywood has for most directors meant that instead of expressing individuality through personal themes, they could express personality through universal themes.

It was the genres which provided the artistic form without which the story was often nothing but a verbal message, and which forced directors to reflect about the specific language of their medium, and to develop a code whose virtues were efficiency, formal elegance and lucid simplicity. They developed an aesthetic functionalism whose aim was perfect legibility, and only secondly, individual expression. Yet it seems in retrospect that because a good Hollywood movie managed to combine what are essentially 'technocratic' aesthetic values with a basically humanist, "liberal" narrative tradition, certain moral and social concerns have always been implicitly affirmed, as the felt presence of at times a sensibility of great subtlety and intuition.

The most deplorable defect, to my mind, of so many commercial directors coming from television, is that this capacity of handling even a complex plot, such as, say that of Hawks' *BIG SLEEP* or Tourneur's *OUT OF THE PAST* in a sober and lucid manner, seems to have been completely lost. Owing perhaps to the harmful influence of the auteur theory and a falsely understood notion of the mise-en-scene, some directors indulge in a kind of baroque and ornate elaboration of basically simple plots, without there being so much as a shred of dramatic or thematic necessity for their stylistic grand-guignol. More and more, certain, alas, highly successful films seem to be stuffed with the pink cottonwool of zoom, split-screen, slow-motion and soft-focus, and where once a director sought psychological depth and a sense of the natural dynamics of action, a Peter Yates grovels on the floor in order to shoot a scene through Steve McQueen's legs.

The extent to which the studio-system and the work within genres, imposed a stylistic identity can perhaps most clearly be seen in the career of Losey, who, after he left Hollywood, took ten years to develop a directorial style both personal and specific. During all this time he made films in England that were unmistakeably constructed and shot in the manner of a Hollywood movie. From *THE SLEEPING TIGER* to *BLIND DATE* and *THE CRIMINAL*, Losey was always working on films in which he could express himself only in the oblique, but nonetheless highly effective stylization of a genre-director. Since *THE SERVANT* and *EVE* he often seems to have paid the price of eclecticism, for he has been experimenting with new modes of cinematic expression in a way a Bergman or Bunuel never experimented, however important changes have occurred in their view of the cinema. Losey's fate is symptomatic. Many Hollywood directors, who during the last decade have, by choice or by necessity, gone independent, seem today like exiles, cut off from the cinema they knew, and forced into the perilous realms of innovation and experiment. Only few have, like Losey, survived artistic shipwreck. And even such an old hand as Preminger appears to have temporarily lost his bearings.

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From the position which I have taken, the question of artistic value revolves to a large extent around the notion of aesthetic unity and formal coherence - as do, in a way, the questions of authorship and genre. Now, there seem to me several ways in which the classical Hollywood movie contrives to be coherent. Most important, it is through the unity of action. Because of its nature as a narrative genre, the American cinema creates a universe which is governed by a certain fundamental dramatic logic. Like the woof of a carpet, it holds together the fictional world, and allows the thematic and moral patterns to emerge. To put it schematically, Hollywood rigorously respects and adheres to a first-level verisimilitude, in which any change of time, of place, of protagonist, is internally motivated, and communicated to the audience through a cinematic language primarily destined to follow, as closely as possible, the dramatic and psychological exigencies of the action. As Walsh has said, there is only one way in which to shoot a scene, and that's the way which shows the audience what's happening next. Any consideration of the value of the mise-en-scene must in consequence be based on recognizing the primacy of the dramatic continuum over directorial 'self-expression', since whatever point - moral, intellectual, emotional - the director cares to make, he will have to ensure that it does not violate the transparency of his story-line. We can see at once the place and importance of the aesthetic virtues outlined above, namely efficiency, sobriety, elegance and simplicity as the condition sine qua non of Hollywood movie-making: they alone provide a film's formal coherence, precondition of any expressive or thematic

potential.

This does not mean that **every** film needs to have this narrative continuum - the more and more elliptical handling of the narrative in certain recent American films, and the anti-dramatic narratives of European directors disprove it -, but where the illusionist logic of the temporal-spatial unity is abandoned, the individual image radically changes its status, and - as I shall try to show - both its syntagmatic ('narrative') as well as its paradigmatic ('symbolic') uses are fundamentally altered. This, among the European directors, only Godard has grasped in its full significance, while Bunuel knew it all along.

To put it paradoxically, one might say that in the American cinema, it is the prima facie ontological autonomy of the events and situations vis-a-vis the characters, the illusion of a real world, which allows a Hollywood director to use story and intrigue 'abstractly'. As Erwin Panofski pointed out, for example, the radically different syntactical structure of the American cinema in comparison with literature makes it possible that a bad story can furnish a good film and vice versa.

A second type of unity, closely related to the dramatic unity of action, is of course the unity provided by the conventions of the genre. But if we look at the thriller-genre, we see that it not only possesses its own iconography, the force of a cinematic-thematic tradition to hold it together, but often has an added element, namely the unity of suspense. This special case of the dramatic continuum, - special, in that it presents evidence of an accelerated sense of causality and fatalism - operates occasionally at the expense of plausibility and verisimilitude. For the creation of suspense can often have a unifying force which successfully overplays plot-weaknesses and schematic characters.

Perhaps one of the most audacious films of this kind, which manages to persuade an audience of a dramatic inevitability purely by means of suspense, is Siegel's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*, where the final transformation of the girl into a zombie is in blatant contradiction to the supposed body-substitution which had previously motivated the film, for if a person could change simply through excessive fatigue and nervous exhaustion, what's the need for all the giant pods? Yet we are convinced by it, because Siegel's handling of the suspense, literally suspends both narrative logic and disbelief, in order to convey the more powerfully a different order of logic - call it the logic of existential fear - for which the pseudo-rational explanation is only a vehicle, the conveyor-belt of our involvement. And this is of course Siegel's thematic aim: to discredit a certain scientific positivism and its attendant petty-bourgeois conformism, in the name of a passionate appeal to elemental emotions.

What such a film as Siegel's does retain, however, despite its heavy formal and structural stylization, are two things, both very important in the American cinema - the behavioral realism of the actors, and the 'ordinariness' of the main protagonist. The latter exemplifies another kind of unity - namely that of the hero. Perhaps most, certainly some of the best Hollywood movies made during the 50s derive their persuasive aesthetic coherence from the way the dramatic weight is concentrated on a single person. Thus, the most common and unfailing manner of structuring a film is to have a central protagonist with a cause, a goal, a purpose - in short, a motivation for action which sustains the dramatic interest of a film, and which preferably contains an unflagging emotional charge. We think, for example, of the heroes in Anthony Mann's westerns, propelled as they are by their sense of justice, their urge for vengeance. Or - as a significant contract - of Boetticher's Randolph Scott characters, whose slow-burning emotional and moral impulses are so deeply buried and sublimated into a cool, detachedly ironic stoicism, that they surface as a wholly abstract - on the level of the mise-en-scene strongly geometrical - motif, which structures the action of, say, *COMANCHE STATION* into its curiously circular form.

The hero's central drive not only furnishes his identity - enhanced as it is by the physical **presence** of an established star - it also ensures the predominat ly unilinear (and that can include, of course, circular), yet essentially 'closed' development of the typical American movie, where a personal initiative a subjective, instinctual choice so often materializes as an objective necessity (through the mechanism of crime, guilt, etc.), finally to overtake the hero as his personal fate and destiny.

This, as one knows, is a typically Langian situation, and we find it in his three most famous American films, *FURY, YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE* and *THE BIG HEAT*. All these films start from a personal, subjective sense of injustice and moral outrage which triggers off a machinery that determines and dominates all the hero's subsequent actions. Lang, however, uses the stock dramatic device critically, in order to dismantle the ideology of personal initiative and private morality in a mass-society, while still giving his heroes the tragic dignity of a unique existence.

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In general terms the presence of a central protagonist means that a vast variety of plots and a diversity of directorial themes can nonetheless have a common structural denominator and a near-identical dramatic function. Hence the persistent impression that people in Hollywood movies always have a kind of dogged energy - not to give up in the face of adversity, to better their lot, to believe in the future, etc. - which has frequently been ridiculed and interpreted as evidence of a facile and insufferable optimism, a bogus craving for the happy ending. This view is an untenable simplification.

Rather, one ought to recognize that the happy ending is a structural constant, functioning like a coda in a musical context, or a trope in a rhetorical discourse. Once the story-line is no longer seen as the only or even the most significant part of the content, it would become apparent that there exists an important interrelation between the diversely motivated drives of the heroes - whether it is greed for money, thirst for adventure, social ambition, hate, vengeance, dreams of power - and the dramatic principle of action in the American cinema. For, as even the most cursory analysis of the narrative structure of half a dozen American movies of the 50s would show, a variety of socially and morally defined aims nevertheless rely for their aesthetic embodiment on an identical or significantly similar emotional substructure, governed by the articulation and distribution of psychic energy. One of the most significant

implications of this - and one that ought to give rise to a lot more controversy than it does - is that morality in the American cinema manifests itself in terms of aesthetic values, and that ethical choices are elaborated not on the basis of intellectual argument, but entirely by means of psychological pressures and needs. This factor has a momentous importance if we want to get a clearer picture about the ideological function of the American cinema, and I shall return to the point in due course.

Practically, two considerations impose themselves. Firstly, we note that in the majority of Hollywood films during the classical period, the living out of an emotional impulse or drive is accompanied and parallelled by a deepening of moral awareness, a growth and progress in the hero's consciousness, or exemplary death intervening, the consciousness of the audience. Through the psychic energy available in the person of the protagonist, if you like, through his essentially unreflected and often explicitly non-intellectual mode of perceiving and experiencing social and human reality, the movies conduct a kind of education of sensibility, a clarification of basic emotional responses which is of enormous cultural significance. The basic pattern of the Hollywood movie is an accumulative one: from simple impulse to experience of complexity. What a character has to come to terms with in so many movies, is the impossibility of instantaneous gratification.

This, as we know, is one of the primary cultural acts, and constitutes the creative principle par excellence. The movies show how the emotional potentials of a character have to disperse themselves in the labyrinth of the real world. Alternatively, in order to escape from a hateful and unresponsive world, they are impelled to constructing an imaginary world, an anti-reality which is tested against the forces and pressures of the real world. But this 'sublimation' of a desire for action is at the same time the driving force towards the spectacle, which of course, in its most grandiose form, is the cinema. Hollywood has taught America the collective virtues of cultural sublimation, of controlling the individual's creative and destructive impulses - always in the name of community values, the national interest, global survival. Yet, significantly, it has transmitted this message in a code which secures Hollywood's continuation. And that is also its greatness: like every art, its first and last reference is to itself. Like every genuinely cultural myth, its form is contradiction, its meaning, however, tautological.

If one were pressed to define by a single aesthetic feature the difference between the 50s and the Hollywood films of today and the late 60s, it would probably be the increasingly dislocated emotional identity of the central protagonists, and the almost total absence of the central drive and its dramatic mechanisms. Instead we have the comedies of Jerry Lewis, which draw from the distortions, the spasms, the interrupted flow of the emotional impetus their most subtle and disturbing effects. Or, as in Peckinpah's *WILD BUNCH* and countless other, lesser movies, we have heroes who shrug their shoulders and laugh uncontrollably for no apparent reason, only suddenly to break into outbursts of unmotivated and wholly irrational violence - evidence of an unsublimated energy which is no longer translated into clearly identifiable moral and social objectives. Individual violence, for example, in Ray or early Losey has a complex psychological and cultural **value** - it was a necessary step in the hero's education, and it provoked, as in Losey's *THE LAWLESS*, or in Siegel's *BODY SNATCHERS*, or Lang's *FURY* the ruthless collective and institutionalized violence of the forces of law and order, of the bigoted community, threatened by the outsider.

Today, despite all the talk about violence, directors seem to have lost this dual perspective on violence, they treat it either as a purely aesthetic **quantity**, or at best as the cheerfully admitted reflection of an aberrant national pathology. What in Penn is still couched in a form that understands itself as half-critical, half-apologetic, becomes in *BUTCH CASSIDY* a bland opportunism. Indeed, as always, it is the excessively aestheticising tendency of the modern commercial cinema, which reveals most palpably its artistic nihilism. For where Hollywood's great films of the classical tradition are above all critically percept ve is in depicting the emotional substructure of a particular social condition or individual crisis, by obsessively insisting on the irremediable contradiction between desire and fulfilment, between private frustration and the fantasies of glory, between the forces of the imagination and restrictive social behaviour - which is finally the existential rift between seeming and being, heritage of European romanticism and the puritan ethic. Today, these essential contradictions are being slurred over by a cult of the aesthetically pleasing.

Obviously, this is a complex process, since on the one hand, it reflects an actual change in American society and its predominant mood - one to which Hollywood, as usual has reacted with uncanny speed, showing that it still has its finger on the nation's emotional pulse, even if this is now the pulse of a much younger generation. On the other hand, it raises structural and dramatic problems which only few directors have recognized, and none has yet satisfactorily resolved. Kazan's *THE ARRANGEMENT* is a typical example of a film that tries to confront the problem of the unmotivated hero, whose life as a result, falls into its disconnected parts, and is only patched together by the negative force of emotional stress and the withdrawal of sexual gratification, - but the analytic-reflective mode of narration remains unsatisfactory, precisely because Kazan cannot resolve the aesthetic problem of finding a principle of unity, which would hold the film together on the level of motivation. *EASY RIDER*, by contrast, relies on a perfectly conventional dramatic structure, with the motif of the journey - which, in the true tradition of Hollywood's black romanticism, can only lead to death, - underscoring the goal-oriented motivation of its heroes.

What makes the film interesting, is that it signalizes this goal-orientation more or less as explicitly nostalgic, as a journey into the national past - thus having the best of both worlds. And just as in the classical movie, the hero learns something from his quest about himself and about the world, so Billy and Captain America learn the lesson of total failure - that they cannot live among the hippies, that the American South is murderous, and that, in short, "we blew it". Given the present ideological climate, such an admission may seem the sign of a new realism. In terms of the ideological "content" of the **form**, however, the sacrificial deaths of the heroes spell a far more mystifying and confused message than a great movie of the 50s - obsessed with a similar presentment of failure - would ever have propagated. In fact, one may well argue that *EASY RIDER* ends by affirming a moral stance which Nicholas Ray's movies once took as their starting point.

(to be continued)

Thomas ELSAESSER

the american cinema *3. an outlook*

"Il n'y a pas à se le cacher; ce que nous traversons en ce moment, ce sont les années noires du cinéma." Jacques Lourcelles, *Présence du Cinéma* **No. 24-25, Autumn 1967.**

Crisis and transition seem the dominant moods of the American cinema at the present time; yet, every year, denigrators of Hollywood proclaim the death of the old form. The economic figures alone belie this; it is surprising to discover how attenuated has been this 'death' of the classical cinema. The period of 1951-1961 was crucial, for within that time, film production per year fell from 391 to 131; over the same period, audiences dropped from ninety million to forty-two million. That was ten years ago, within which time developments, both artistic and economic, have definitely occurred concerning the exact nature of the American commercial cinema, but the expanse of the period would seem to contradict opinion of demise. The aim of this article is a brief investigation of the implications of the end of the classical tradition, the voluntary or enforced silence of the veteran directors, (Ford, Walsh, Lang, etc.), whose work over a space of fifty years constitutes the component parts of this essential classicism. With the new decade, the farewell to this tradition is inevitable, and it is perhaps difficult for the disillusioned enthusiast to restrain his nostalgia for the 'Golden Age'. But although MONOGRAM recognises the sentiment, we do not intend to found an editorial policy on such self-indulgence.

▲ **Steve McQueen Lee Remick in Robert Mulligan's BABY THE RAIN MUST FALL**

Paradoxically, it is at this moment of apparent decay that the tradition must be investigated, its achievement must be analysed and evaluated, its limitations defined. Most of all, a perspective must be attained. With the state of English film criticism at the present time, almost no advance on this investigation is apparent, beyond facile cult interest. That it is immensely important is unnecessary to state, for the influence of Hollywood, whether beneficient or hostile, pervades almost every area of the cinema, and an interest in the art itself compels an interest in the American cinema.

However, the sphere of this article must first of all be delineated. With the collapse of the tyrannical, monolithic nature of Hollywood, sentiments of optimism have been expressed, a realization that radical experimentation can now manifest itself. Most obviously, this has been demonstrated by the American 'Underground' cinema, whose brand of modernism is patently schismatic. I remain critically unqualified to describe and evaluate this amorphous and influential movement, and will not make any attempt to discuss it in this present article, whose purpose is to attempt some analysis of the more traditionally modernistic trends that have arisen from the American commercial cinema. The directors discussed here are those who seem to us to appear aware of the problems inherent in their more traditional modes of expression, the movies are those who have assimilated these problems by their intrinsic nature.

Of the many consequences of such comparatively modern factors in the transition in Hollywood as increased liberalism of censorship, and the stylistic influence of television, the most important is the fragmentation of the narrative structure which provided a unified framework, and which has been reflected in the dissolution of the paradigms of genre. The linear energy at the base of this framework, externalised most concretely in the notion of the quest, but to found even in the most apparently undramatic works in the American cinema, (as the respective oeuvres of Hawks

and Tourneur testify), has been diluted, but not dissipated. The first evidence of a novel structure appeared with the 'adult' melodramas of the late fifties and early sixties, in which emphasis was on emotional conflict of character embodied in a more flexible narrative framework, where lineation was subsumed in a finer ambiguity of expression. Thus, in a representative movie such as *STRANGERS WHEN WE MEET* (1960) of Richard Quine, the emotional conflicts of the various characters were concretized in the building of the perfect house, designed by the frustrated artist for the successful novelist. With the magnificent image of the completed but unfurnished house, these conflicts were either resolved or remained ambiguous in an excellent equilibrium of effect which, by dispensing with a contrived conclusion, demonstrated an 'instructive dissonance'.

It is easy to see how important this development has been to the American cinema if we glance at several modern movies which attempt to readopt the notion of the quest in the symbol of the journey as moral/emotional dialectic (cf. *EASY RIDER*, Francis Ford Coppola's *THE RAIN PEOPLE*). What has not been realized in such experiments is the degree to which the **resolution** of the quest, the goal, the ultimate achievement, dominates and codifies the elements that compose the structure, imparting a dynamic energy which is otherwise absent. A movie such as *EASY RIDER* is concerned with the search for identity, and thus is unsure of its true nature; it becomes composed of disparate elements whose only real connection is the journey itself. Instead of the journey acting as externalization of interior drive, the burden is forced on the skeleton itself, inevitably schematizing the movie and jeopardizing any meaning it may have. Similarly, in the movies of Monte Hellman, especially in *THE SHOOTING*, the force of the journey metaphor is negated by a mise-en-scene which emphasizes a pre-determined ritualism; the quest becomes a circle. With the lack of dynamism imparted by a strictly formal lineation, the central metaphor appears infinitely contrived. There is an important consequence of this; for without the corresponding emotional intensity, a whole range of metaphoric articulation employed by Hollywood becomes redundant. Without the pulsation of concrete drive, the contrivance of the mechanism itself is exposed. It is this consequence that Kazan fails to realize in *THE ARRANGEMENT*, in his use of the persons of the hero and his alter-ego, when they appear on the screen at the same time. The intention is clear enough, but, short of dynamic emotional impact, the device does not convince. In *THE ARRANGEMENT*, we find a chaotic attempt to synthesize classical and modern techniques; consequently, the limitations of the classical are silhouetted, because they are not endorsed by the requisite emotion.

The reason why a pre-ordained narrative framework is no longer valid seems clear enough; it assumes unquestioningly a belief in the attainment of identity, and the validity of instinctive action. These are beliefs which cannot be sustained in the climate of modern America. An example relevant here is of course the gradual collapse of the efficacy of the heroic individual in the American cinema, demonstrated by movies from Walsh's *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD*, and Fuller's *SHOCK CORRIDOR* through to Schaffner's *PATTON: LUST FOR GLORY*, which demonstrate that the individualist stance is that of the maniac, and that the price of true identity is insanity. The hero, as shown in the opening sequence of *PATTON*, is reducible to a set of objects. Identity is only attainable through an evolutionary process, not by the corrupted force of a tyrannical free agency.

In *DUEL AT DIABLO*, made in 1964 by Ralph Nelson, a seminal film in many respects, the structure develops from an aborted quest to a gradually conceived situation, within which the characters lose their false, consciously-willed roles, and develop towards a truer identity. The army scout surpasses his naive plan of revenge, the Negro dandy reverts to his previous military role, the captain becomes truly heroic, not through the blind futility of his dreams, but through a noble effort to save the troop that he despises, the half-caste girl accepts her white identity while retaining her native dignity. In *DUEL AT DIABLO*, the action is no longer free and instinctive, but elliptical, consciously planned and executed: in this contradiction of genre pattern, it defines the modern movement. The accent is on character development within the confines of a clearly delineated situation, but the pattern that the situation evolves is not an absolutely determined one; there is an erosion in the strict outline of the paradigm. Characters constantly surprise the audience in their mode of behaviour; an example is the husband of the Indian girl who commences the movie as an unsympathetic figure, then gradually arouses our sympathy and the girl's renewed love, before it is revealed that he scalped the Indian wife of the army scout.

Hence, a prerequisite of the modern movie that attempts a coherent investigation of the reality which it analyzes is the ambiguous, open-ended situation, while nevertheless retaining a certain formal quality. Robert Mulligan's *BABY THE RAIN MUST FALL* commences with the arrival of Lee Remick and her small daughter in an American small-town in order to find her husband who is a convict in the nearby penetentiary, newly released on parole, and ends with her departure once again. Its whole trajectory reveals a sensibility aware of the problems of cinematic form arising from the dialectic between formal discipline and a sense of the contingent. Steve McQueen plays the husband who sings in a rock band against the orders of the police; he is the embodiment of the redundancy of pure energy, (symbolized in the scene where he futilely chases a truck down a highway in a final, desperate attempt to evade the police, eventually falling exhausted by the side of the road), which no long has efficacy in a dense, elliptical reality. He rebels against the apparently atavistic power that an old woman who has secured his parole for him wields against him, but Mulligan renders this attitude false in the scene around the old house within which the woman is dying, by deliberately constructing an unconvincingly 'eerie' atmosphere, as if out of a completely separate film. Eventually, when she dies, leaving him nothing in her will, McQueen tries to dig up her grave in a pathetic, insane attempt to shrug off her influence.

In *BABY THE RAIN MUST FALL*, Mulligan manages to weave the wealth of detail into a firm but flexible structure; his aim is the intimate rather than the grand metaphor, in his attempt to render the unique world of personal relations rather than the clear world of action. An example of this comes in the scene where McQueen is beaten up. Instead of showing the fight as a dramatic climax, Mulligan dissolves halfway through the scene, because for him action is only important in the way it affects the central husband-and-wife relationship; the next shot shows McQueen's shadow on the door of the cabin where they are staying, while inside the girl is putting the child to bed, demonstrating how every action of McQueen alienates him from his family. In a touching scene, McQueen sings to his wife and child as they sit on the porch of the cabin, on the outskirts of town, by the highway, beside them a dance poster advertising the rock band. It is which perfectly described the intimate, personal atmosphere that Lee Remick strives towards, the self-enclosed world of the family. It is this equilibrium of the child and the young tree which she plants outside the cabin, and the suffering hope of the wife which confers on the ending a continued sense of potential. Mulligan's achievement in *BABY, THE RAIN MUST FALL* is a masterpiece in miniature, a movie which conveys ambiguity by concrete precision in the mise-en-scene, through the subtlety of the metaphors, which convey perfectly the fragility of the situation.

However, it is no coincidence that the finest director of the decade, Blake Edwards, is primarily a comic artist, although he has proved himself equally talented in the thriller genre, (*GRIP OF FEAR*), and in the melodrama, (*DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES*). The concerns of American comedy have always devolved on the question of identity, the conflict of the private and the public role. However, the comedy film has undergone an important metamorphosis recently, in as far as its subject has been treated with a more bitter irony than before, in keeping with the pathetic inability of the individual to achieve any truth in his existence, (cf. the familiar screen persona of Jerry Lewis, for example). Jean Douchet has defined Edwards' vision thus: " C'est, si l'on veut, et pour être un peu sociologique, la peinture de l'inadaptation de l'Americain moyen dans sa propre civilization, et de son impuissance à obtenir le bonheur qu'elle lui promet". From the social into the universal; never has the American dream seemed so fragile as in the films of Edwards. His brittle, incisive comedy is a reaction to the modern condition of the world. It is his delicacy that saves him from the brash self-parody of Tashlin or Wilder, (*SHERLOCK HOLMES* excepted); the detailed precision of effect, and equilibrium of presentation noted earlier in Mulligan that enables him to work within a traditional framework without any detriment to artistic expression.

Edwards' taste is for the situation, and his movie *THE GREAT RACE* is a hilarious homage to the passing of the classical narrative tradition, taking formulaic conceptions of character, (the dashing hero in white, the swarthy, mustachoid villain and his ludicrous associate), and converting them into farcical strip-cartoon caricatures. As I have already noted in a short article on the director, (*Brighton Film Review* No.20), many of his movies are dilations of a static situation, (particularly *HIGH TIME, WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR DADDY?* and *THE PARTY*), within which characters define their true roles. In *THE PARTY*, Edwards constructed his movie around Peter Sellers and a single set, the large, expansive house of a film tycoon, in which the false mechanical world of the bourgeoisie is inexorably revealed as deadening. Only the ironic detachment of an Edwards could impart coherence to such a conception; this he achieves with his slow-burn gags, which establish relations between people despite artificial social barriers, (the caviar gag for example, where the smell of the caviar is transmitted from hand to hand). The camera rests with an objective viewpoint as reality is usurped by farce and unrestricted action, so that observation of social 'moeurs' is gradually replaced by observation of the dissolution into chaos which Sellers precipitates, as surely as he has destroyed the entire film set in the pre-credit sequence. For Edwards, the veneer of civilized existence, the 'plastic forms of urban life' as Sarris terms it, is thin indeed; all that is necessary for destruction is the innocent agent of chaos who sets off a rigorous causality whose destination is the realm of the absurd. Important to Edwards is a detailed gradation of this chain-reaction, expressed through a constant return to a basic gag with variations, (cf. the antics of the drunken waiter in *THE PARTY*). The movement towards chaos is a gradual one; the universe of the director wills this liberating and yet sinister metamorphosis because his own absurd logic dominates the process of the movie. Ultimately, all Edwards' gags are symptomatic of a moral condition, metaphors for a human situation; although preserving a comic autonomy, his humour is dark and serious. With the final situation of the strangled waiter gag, Edwards demonstrates that it is the system which is self-defeating, that it is responsible for the chaos rather than the character who first made it possible, whose function is simply that of a catalyst. In *THE PARTY*, the comedy is not inhibited by any prior determination to achieve significance; the meaning is derived from the delicate comic structure of the whole movie. It is an advantage of the classical comedy picture that it may be interpreted on several levels of meaning; it is not necessary to imbue it with a contemporary significance to enable it to comment on human behaviour.

For it will be noticed that the **basis** of Edwards' comic method differ very little from the original humour of Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy. He has evidently studied the great comedians, and, absorbing their art, has used it as a technical spring-board from which he can articulate his specifically modern concerns. An example here is the chicken gag from *THE PARTY*, which is derived from a Chaplin short, as are the gags centred around the 'in-out' doors between the dining-room and the kitchen in the same film. But, most importantly, it is the tone to which these gags contribute that has been transmuted; Edwards' humour is malicious in the extreme, and axiomatic slapstick gags are employed as an endorsement of the sinister atmosphere.

Blake Edwards is the finest director working in the American commercial cinema at the present time, because he has assimilated the relevant features of the classical tradition and reworked them in order to express a contemporary view of the reality that confronts him. Because of his awareness of the tradition, he has managed to lay a foundation, demonstrate concrete points of reference for the manner in which he employs certain cinematic techniques. The problem with the contemporary American cinema is its intrinsic lack of frames of reference; with an inability to forge entertainment formulas which will guarantee financial success, it has increasingly grasped blindly at trends, particularly in relation to the youth market. With this sudden influx of potential subject material however there has been no fusion of content with the appropriate form. For example, the style of recent movies whose concern has been student unrest or drug-taking has usually devolved on gratuitous technical trickery, (use of huge zooms, hand-held camera etc.), whose aim is superficial 'aesthetic' effect, (*THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT, MEDIUM COOL*). This is not, of course, to exclude the possibility of eventual consonance in the future, simply to point out that no engagement with the subject-matter can be possible if the 'style' is directed towards such superficial ends, without any sense of structure or the organic relation of every frame to a total conception of the movie itself. This article is a plea for such a sense of form; the best of the American commercial cinema demonstrates it. But it will be up to figures such as Edwards and Mulligan to show how much further the narrative framework can instructively take us.

Peter LLOYD

FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE

In his late films, Losey has become increasingly concerned with the tensions of a closed situation. With an austere, cerebral eye, (at its finest in the intensive candour of *SECRET CEREMONY*, at its most banal in the contrived ritual of *THE SERVANT*) he has explored the ramifications of a situation in which the individual, turned in upon himself, achieves only tragic self-negation. Imposed, stifling decor has been at the heart of these movies, the universe constructed by a character as protection, which is revealed as potentially destructive, (cf. the palatial voids of *BOOM* and *SECRET CEREMONY*). The oppression of these environments has, in *FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE*, been transferred to universal proportions; the two fleeing protagonists, the tough veteran Mac (Robert Shaw), and the inexperienced Ansell (Malcolm McDowell), find the landscape across which they move inherently hostile. In the deliberate zoom-out from a view of a platoon of soldiers hunting them down, Losey shows this; the soldiers in their khaki uniforms, are gradually, before our eyes integrated with the scrubland itself. The landscape seems to vibrate with an insidious life of its own.

Ostensibly, the theme of *FIGURES* is education and individuality. The two concepts have been intricately associated in the work of Losey, since their original affirmation in *THE BOY WITH THE GREEN HAIR*. They often take the form of a relationship between an older and a younger protagonist, (cf. *BLIND DATE, KING AND COUNTRY, ACCIDENT*), whose mutual experiences reveal new levels of awareness, usually at the expense of moral efficacy. Ansell, the young soldier who has accompanied the hard, bitter Mac on his escape from prison faces initiation into the uncompromising world of the older man. Eventually he reaches a certain level of self-reliance, but this baptism is inevitably at the expense of innocence. This can be seen most clearly by a comparison of the manner in which Losey shoots the two important individual murders in the movie, those of the goatherd in the beginning, and the guard in the power-house, after the battle in the cane-field. It is important that the killing of the goatherd takes place off-screen, because its significance lies inherently in Ansell's reaction to it; he has refused to participate. As Mac goes off to perform the murder, the camera rests on a close-up of Ansell; then, as the sound of Mac's boots kicking the goatherd to death are heard on the soundtrack, the camera moves round Ansell slowly, demonstrating the awakening realization of what the killing constitutes in terms of survival, its implicit necessity, until placed behind his back, Mac returns into frame, railing at his companion. The second killing is, however, performed by Ansell himself; the camera waits behind with Mac, while the younger man advances to the power-house. The intended victim is seen framed through a small window, and, as Ansell cuts the sentry's throat, Losey cuts to a close-up, showing the details of the killing. Far from being a gratuitous device, the close-up is significant because it represents to Ansell and the audience, the reality of the murder; only since the battle in the cane-field has Ansell approached an awareness of this reality, and its attendant sublimation of a queasy innocence in the predominant will to survival.

However, what is most interesting about Losey's movie is its structure; in as far as the director has apparently chosen to reinvestigate the implications of the structure which conferred on the American cinema its dynamism and which constituted the classical aesthetic. The structure of *FIGURES* is the structure of the quest, the concrete canalization of energy; the trajectory is from the lowland sea to the high mountains. However, the presentation of the quest demonstrates its essentially reflective nature; the structure does not contain the internal coherence bestowed on, for example, a Walsh movie of the forties or early fifties, by virtue of the classical paradigm. The relationship between the figures in the landscape and the helicopter seem less a chase than a protracted harassment; instead of the drive of action constituting the central core of the movie, Losey uses it as punctuation, (note how the presentation of action is sudden, explosive; the helicopter appearing over the ridge as Mac and Ansell walk down to the olive grove, or the ambush in the town square). One can perceive a shift in emphasis here; accent on character relations is intensified, action is relegated to the role of catalyst.

In fact, like all good films, *FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE* can be viewed as a reflection on the art of the cinema, and, in the portrayal of the two central characters, we can find an attempt, on Losey's part, to symbolize his own dialectic on the nature, and the contemporary relevance of, the classical tradition; in fact, this aspect of the movie strikes the critic with more force than that which attempts to pass the film off as a serious allegory on the human condition, (an aspect which Losey fortunately minimizes as far as the scenario allows). In *FIGURES*, there is large scope for a critique of the fatuous 'lyrical' cinema, to which modern commercial cinema has been treating us since the pre-established traditions collapsed, and Losey utilizes this to the fullest extent. There are, for example, several shots which show us the helicopter in flight, accompanied not by the natural soundtrack but by the eerie film score. This suffices as an example of the trend of gratuitously 'immediate' aesthetic effect which some directors imagine can replace an image which derives its full force of meaning within the structure of the whole. In *FIGURES*, however, Losey relates it to the character of Mac, who gradually obsesses himself with the illusory freedom that the flight of the helicopter represents. For Mac is the embodiment of stasis; in one shot in a church, where the pair have taken refuge after the alarm has been raised, Losey frames Mac at the end of a row of statues. The veteran soldier can only exist in a world with tangible frames of reference, the world of the jungle, an existence of continual crisis; the helicopter embodies the illusion of omnipotence, of omnipresence, but in fact fails in its duty through an inability to recognize the fundamental, although equivocal world of human contingency where Mac can survive. Between the two is the nebulous figure of Ansell, who is unfortunately borne down by his capacity as the allegorical figure of youth and opportunity, but who, through his experience, will find a civilized equilibrium in the modern world.

Mac cannot cross his own border; Ansell's anguished cry of "what about me?" will inevitably go unanswered. Mac has taught him all that it is possible for him to teach. His is indeed a romantic death, as Losey choreographs magnificently his last moments, the swoop of the camera when placed in the helicopter, the slow movements of his body observed with an immobile camera. *FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE* exemplifies this ability to utilize the movements of his camera, (cf. the hand-held sequences early on when the helicopter harasses the pair in open country, or the deliberate economy of the sequences in the village where they disturb the mourning woman), which can only be derived from the rigours for self-effacement which his apprenticeship in Hollywood demanded. Similarly, the direct method of filming the battle in the cane-field, (mirrored by the elemental imagery of fire and water in this sequence), confers considerably more sense of the physical than the ritualistic cop-outs of Penn, Peckinpah or the commerical Italian directors.

FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE is an ambiguous movie; its final camera movement, shot from within the helicopter, is a steep pull away from Mac's body up to a height from where we survey the stretch of country over which the two men have travelled. It is the cinematic equivalent of a question-mark, and unites the double perspective, of subject and art, that the film demonstrated. In it, Losey looks back at the ground that he has covered, and implicit in the regard is the recognition that the achievement that it represents is inviolable but also irrecoverable. But, if any 'commercial' director possesses the ability to break new ground, the successes and the failures of *FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE* prove it to be Losey.

Peter LLOYD

FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE (GB, 1970) dir.: Joseph Losey, Scr.: Robert Shaw based on a novel by Barry England, phot.: Henri Alkan (Panav. Technic.) mus. : Richard Rodney Bennett; Robert Shaw (MacConnachie), Malcolm McDowell (Ansell).

L'ENFANT SAUVAGE

Truffaut's *L'ENFANT SAUVAGE* is an important film for a director whose films have sometimes been dismissed as works which are attractive but somehow lightweight because they fail to engage intellectually. In the case of *L'ENFANT SAUVAGE* the break with the past is particularly evident both in the subject matter and the way in which it is treated. The script is based upon the account which Jean Itard wrote in 1801 of his attempts to educate a savage boy found in the forests of Aveyron, a treatise in which Itard pioneered the socially radical view that subnormality should be attributed to lack of educational opportunity rather than to any inherited defectiveness. The conflict, familiar to us from Truffaut's earlier films, between an individual and the society which seeks to change him, is present here, but we are no longer invited to sympathise with the victim nor is his point of view allowed to dominate, so that the environment is treated as something undifferentiatedly hostile. Itard also demands our sympathies, as well as the boy, although in neither case is our admiration allowed to be unqualified. Although Truffaut creates no significant dialogue which is not contained in Itard's book, it is interesting that the way in which the story is rendered cinematically tends to make Itard appear in a rather less attractive light than he does in the book. Truffaut plays up a quality of coldness about Itard, a single-minded devotion to the task in hand and an obliviousness toward the suffering of Victor (the name he gives the wild boy) which is barely to be found in the journal, where Itard presents himself as a sensitive humanist. In the journal, for example, Itard writes of how Victor is reduced to tears by his punishments and of his own regret at the inhuman curiosity of man who tore him from his innocent and happy life, while in the film Itard is pictured writing the e words at his desk while in the same room Victor weeps uncomforted. We are invited to identify with Itard but this identification is only one element in the complex of attitudes toward Itard which the film suggests.

Itard, played by Truffaut himself in the film, is seen to be a complexly motivated character. He makes his first appearance in the film writing a letter expressing his interest in obtaining custody of the boy so that he might observe him in order to obtain evidence of what man owes to his education, and in due course the boy is seen, on admission to the deaf-mute asylum where Itard works, being handled as an inanimate object while his height, skin colour, teeth are examined. But at the moment when Itard is seen conceiving the plan of educating the boy in his own home his decision is seen to follow from his disapproval of the way in which the boy has been exhibited by the janitor at the asylum as if he were a wild animal. In opposition to the attitude that the boy might as well earn his keep as a circus side show, and in the face of the scepticism of the educational authorities and the official diagnosis of the boy as an imbecile, Itard champions the boy's innate intelligence and devotes his time to the attempt to educate the boy. Yet the comparison with the treatment which Victor receives in Itard's home from the housekeeper, Mme. Guerin, shows that Itard is not motivated by simple benevolence alone but also by an obsession which often demands the disregard of Victor's inclinations for the sake of needs which he does not recognise. Mme. Guerin gives the boy physical care and the undemanding affection of a mother; in contrast there is a minimum of physical contact between Itard and the boy while in the interests of Victor's education Itard devises tasks for him which are progressively more taxing. At one point she turns on Itard and makes the pertinent criticism that Victor is never allowed to enjoy himself as other boys are for all his pleasures are turned into exercises. The film can contain this observation and also insist that if Mme. Guerin had had her way and Victor were treated with simple kindness, he would have remained an imbecile. He is seen performing small household tasks for the housekeeper but he is not stretched, so that when for example he helps her to shell peas Victor is given a smaller bowl to fill so that it will appear to him that he has achieved more than she has. Itard is more demanding because his estimate of Victor is a higher one than hers'. Simple mother love is contrasted against something like paternal affection, the main element in which is the desire to be able to respect and communicate with an intelligent fellow being. As Itard says when Victor rebels against the deliberate imposition of an unjust punishment, "It would have been sweet to me could I have made my pupil understand and have told him how this proof - (that the feeling of justice was no longer foreign to him) - filled my heart with satisfaction." The shot of Itard and Victor observing together the effect on a candle flame of the utterance of the vowel sounds is a compact image of Itard's successful communication with Victor. The concluding image, that of Itard watching Mme. Guerin leading Victor upstairs after his voluntary return from his escape while the tutor reflects that lessons will begin again tomorrow, sums up the isolation and the poignancy of Itard's position: the care which Mme. Guerin takes of Victor is of a kind which is immediately appreciated and what Itard gives him is of no obvious use to him.

There are three centres of emotional gravity in the film - Itard, the maternal Guerin and the anarchic boy himself. Incapable of speech he is seen engagin g in a sensuous communication with the natural landscape of his original habitat which contrasts strongly with the more conventional attachment of Itard to the social world and its inhabits. This contrast between nature and culture is the pivot around which the visual elements in the film are organised. Itard is pictured generally within a study in which the predominant figures are geometrical and light pours in from a window so that the objects in the room are clearly defined; the boy is first seen emerging from deep undergrowth and there is a dimness and lack of definition about the picture which suggests a tribute to the silent cinema.

These early scenes are echoed later in the film when Itard is pictured gazing through the window at the figure of Victor in the moonlit garden, barely grasping the ecstatic contemplation of the boy as he seeks to merge himself with the light. Itard reports on his success in weaning the boy away from his reliance on the senses of touch and smell, in training him to depend on sight and hearing also, so that he begins to use all five senses normally. Visually however the film sets up a contrasting opposition between the sensuousness of Victor's absorption in the natural world and Itard's narrow dependence on the written word and on vision at the expense of the other senses. Itard is repeatedly pictured at his desk writing about his experiences; on their daily visits to a neighbouring farm, while Victor is seen revelling in the meadow outside the house, Itard is seen through the open door inside the house playing a board game. While Victor is thus associated with natural landscapes Itard is associated with cultural artifacts, like the chequers, and the wooden alphabets and other educational aids which he devises to help Victor in the task of acquiring the basic social skills, principally that of reading. The mechanism of social repression is especially identified with the medium of print: because Victor must learn to read, it is necessary for him to undergo the ordeal of education; because Itard is attentive to the information that can be conveyed by writing and speech, his mind is closed to wider imaginative possibilities.

The film is thus visually dense in a way which elaborates and comments on the complex relation between Victor and Itard while retaining a thematic purity in that there is hardly anything in the film which is merely decorative or irrelevantly spectacular. The conflict is pared down to essentials, to the relationship between master and pupil, without much sense of an external ongoing reality. A logical development of Truffaut's tendency to deromanticise his heroes in the interests of critical perspective, Victor is no more than a bundle of instincts, a pure victim who is incapable of acting against his environment in his own interests for he is incapable of action in the sense of motivain the film, there is thus a substitution of imminent development for dramatic interaction, in the sense that the implications of Itard's and Victor's positions are explored but there is little change in those positions once the two have met. The development of the film depends not on plot, which is virually non-existent, but rather on the way in which the viewpoints of these two characters is continually contrasted and illuminated, so that our judgement is demanded at every point.

Vivienne LEWIS

L'ENFANT SAUVAGE (France, 1969) dir.: Francois Truffaut, scr.: F.T. and Jean Gruault based on the diaries of Jean Itard, photo.: Nestor Almendros; Jean Pierre Cargol (Victor), F.T. (Jean Itard), Francoise Seigner (Madame Guerin).

Beatrice's cry from *The Changeling* - "I must trust somebody" - seems to echo around the spy movie, eloquently testifying to the failure and death of humanity.

Just as the Western has moved from its heroic past, from affirmation of successful individualism and integrity to the display of the traditional hero as a defeated and anachronistic figure, so the spy genre has come increasingly to engage the attention of film makers and function as a suitable metaphor for the contemporary existential state. Hitchcock has taken up again the themes and situation of *THE LADY VANISHES* (1938) in *TORN CURTAIN* and *TOPAZ*. Sidney Lumet has briefly fulfilled his promise in the excellent *THE DEADLY AFFAIR*, and

THE KREMLIN LETTER (USA, 1970) dir.: John Huston, scr.: J.H. and Gladys Hill based on the novel by Noel Behn, phot.: Ted Scaife Richard Boone (Ward), Bibi Andersson (Erika Boeck), Max von Sydow (Vladimir Kosnov), Patrick O'Neill (Charles Rone), Orson Welles (Bresanavitch), Lila Kedrova.

John Huston has finally returned to the film noir and turned in one of his few completely satisfying films since *THE MALTESE FALCON*

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Gilles Jacob in his note on Huston "Mockery and Morality" in *Cinema Moderne* refers to

> "eroticism and the cruelty, the strangeness, the agonising suspense and shock images of the post-war American crime film"

an epoch marked by the work of Dassin, Siodmak and Huston that has now passed. But in *THE KREMLIN LETTER* the spy genre, the film noir of now, Huston has recovered his direction and moved back into a world like that of *THE MALTESE FALCON, THE ASPHALT JUNGLE* and *TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE* where his sense of "eroticism and cruelty" may be given full play.

The raising of audience expectations of violence and sexual adventure and playing on those expectations in a spirit of nervous titillation has long been part of Huston's procedure and has provoked similar qualifications and misgivings to those aroused by the allied movement towards the celebration of a hero who owes no allegiance but to his own authenticity in a kind of crypto-facism. But in *THE KREMLIN LETTER* the nervous tension and sexual teasing endured by the audience function in a coherent expressive structure rather than, as in the past, an enjoyment of nervous thrills for their own sake. The drag scenes, lesbianism, addiction, female wrestling, homosexuality, masochism and sex murders of *THE KREMLIN LETTER* are wholly consonant with the display of a world of betrayal, contingent violence and the subsumation of individuals and their personal concerns to an instrumental use as the servants of others and of the state. The themes of violence and betrayal that have animated Huston in earlier movies are now voiced in a coherent contemporary setting; Huston has finally found a vehicle enabling him to express his perception of human behaviour as the acts of hunters and hunted within a modern realistic context.

The film begins showing a fragmented but causally associated world: Rone's mission although mysterious is a purposive directed endeavour and the fragmentation that exists is geographical; indeed the association of disparate places and personalities could be said to affirm a connected world of interdependence. One axis of the typology of the traditional spy movie is established; the recruitment of the Highwayman's gang shows the West as colourful, hedonistic, tolerant and cosmopolitan. John Huston himself, in a masterly cameo performance, sounds the sole warning note over Rone's departure from institutionalized group endeavour, the world of loyalty, the U.S. Navy, towards individuated action. There is no question of our response, the movement of the charismatic hero from an authoritarian and collectivist order to the rich and humorous association of extravagant individuals in the Tillinger foundation is an unqualified advance.

Association and identification with the West is enforced through the pleasure the audience vicariously derives from the group's individual activities - something for everyone from George Sanders to Barbara Parkins - an association that is cemented in the nervous excitement with which an audience contemplates the exposure of Barbara Parkins' crutch to an explosion: a tension that is relieved by her success and which only in retrospect can be seen as representative of the ways of cruel and treacherous people. An incident for which Gilles Jacob's formulation "eroticism and violence" is tailor-made.

The other axis, that of the Soviet Union, is established in the consummate sequences introducing Kosnov. The delight offered by long mobile Premingeresque takes, outside and inside the prison (one take of car descending hill, entering prison yard and passengers alighting - one take of Soviet officials climbing staircase and entering cell corridor) is mitigated by the sombre tones and limited colour range of the images and by Kosnov's deliberate mystification of his companions and order for arbitrary killings.

The typology has been clearly established - Soviet Union mysterious, implacable, sombre and cole; the West hedonistic, colourful and open. The forthcoming struggle to be between a loose association of individuals bound by mutual knowledge and an alienated and cruel authoritarianism.

The association of the Tillinger group with pleasure, trust and voluntarism lasts until their entry into the Soviet Union and is affirmed and cemented by the self-sacrifice of the Highwayman for the success of the group's mission. Boone's attack on Rone and the corruption and torture of the Potkin are acceptable in the context of the group proving themselves to each other and establishing conditions necessary to the success of the mission. Identification with the Westerners as a positive force is so successfully established that assent to the corruption of Sonia Potkin is freely given. Her seduction and the torture of her father marks the beginning of a systematic programme of corruption and betrayal, a pattern that informs the behaviour of the "other side" and establishes a world in which treachery and exploitation characterize human action. Kosnov owes his position to the betrayal of Sturdevant and the torture of his associates, Yogi his success to the deception of Erica who in turn deceives her husband, the Warlock to the deceived love of Rudolf, the whore to fostering drug addiction.

At first activity has a clear and purposive orientation; to recover the Kremlin letter as a play in a global struggle between two states, and by implication, two ideologies. But action becomes confused, its purpose obscured and the importance of the letter indefinite. The private nature of the Highwayman's outfit, the ambiguity of Bresnovitch's position, the very existence of the letter and its significance case in doubt, cloud the purpose of rival activities and reveal them as absurd; the world of the film and by extension the modern world is existentially cruel, characterized by individuals preying on one another, frustrated by contingent forces of whose existence they are unaware, producing sudden reversals, the preyed upon become the preying, the vulnerable strong. Rone escapes Bresnovitch's ambush and threatens him, Potkin returns to the Soviet Union and menaces the whole Tillinger operation, a dead man returns, avenges past treachery and betrays his relation and ally.

The final portrayal of confusion, terror and violence proceeding from Boone's initiation of the operation as an act of human revenge against Kosnov and crystallised in his murder is mitigated by its explanatory function; actions that previously seemed arbitrary and chaotic are shown to have been purposive, directed and controlled. Shocking juxtapositions of images of violence and harmony, affirmative heterosexual love with the prostitution of one of the partners. Siberian ice with warm interiors, settle down and the stability and integration implied by early long takes is re-established after the death of Kosnov. Rone and B.A. are re-united by an avuncular Richard Boone. But finally the tentatively established harmony is undercut, Huston's vision of a cruel and senseless universe re-affirmed, love and union remain transitory and a world of terror and sadism re-established as the camera inexorably tracks in onto Rone's sentence - to kill the innocent Potkin family - the scene dominated by the augmenting whine of a jet aeroplane, the final voice drowning all other sensory impressions, a mindless, wordless scream of the lost.

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REALISM: THEORY & PRACTICE

RIO LOBO

RIO LOBO (USA., 1970) dir.: Howard Hawks, scr.: Leigh Bracket, Burton Wohl, sec. unit: Yakima Canutt, photo.: William Clothier, col.: Technicolor, mus.: J. Goldsmith; John Wayne (Cord McNally), Jorge Rivero (Pierre Cordona), Jennifer O'Neill (Shasta), Jack Elam (Phillips), Victor French (Ketcham), Chris Mitchum (Tuscarora)

Cord McNally (John Wayne), when asked what he's so happy about, at the campsite between Blackthorne and Rio Lobo: "Well, I've had about the right number of drinks, an' I'm warm, an' I'm relaxed. Well, if you gentle people can manage without me, I shall go to sleep."

RIO LOBO could be the epitaph of Hawks. Hawks who's still "having fun" with films in his mid-seventies. Hawks who, even more than in *EL DORADO*, has made at once a standard Western adhering to the strictures of the genre and an all-pervading abstraction that makes peace with his past films and with an embracing old age. Hawks who perhaps only now, in a wise aged dream-time, can measure up to Missiaen's praise and "have no imitators, only disciples." (1)

In *RED RIVER*, Dunson (John Wayne) is greatly at conflict with the environment, and the dramatic force of the film centres around his attempts to control it - since characters fill the foreground and the environment the background, much of the aesthetic force of the film is the interplay of fore- and background, and their perceptual relationship. In *RIO LOBO* the environment is almost completely under control. There are numerous instances of what I mean: for instance, "hostile" hornets and trees are harnessed to serve the Confederate hijacking; a great deal is made of Tuscarora's concealment underwater with his self-styled breathing tube - nature is "friendly"; and where natural forces might get the upper hand, a joke is made of it - Phillips devilishly says he hopes there are no rocks on their route to the jail with Ketcham, because they might cause his horse to trip and his gun to go off. My point, however, is that there is a visual correlate of this lack of conflict with the environment and this is an intermingling of the foreground and background.

Of Hawks' Westerns, *THE BIG SKY* and *RIO BRAVO* exhibit the visual clash in dimensions that characterized *RED RIVER* - but *RIO LOBO* (and *EL DORADO*) is stylistically apart, and if this can be explained in terms of themes as well as frames then we may begin to understand more deeply why the film is so good. More generally, there is a polemical aspect here, and it is that Hawks' critics (both admirers and detractors) have, to my mind, so far expressed the Hawks "world-view" in very minimal terms (2), rattling off the implications of the scripts and their embodied themes, his "world" if y like, but blinding themselves to his "view", his way of seeing, his visual style. To discuss visual style in Hawks is especially difficult since he's been hitherto dismissed as an unobtrusive "just-so" camera-eye (3).

What do I mean by a mixing of the foreground and background? Hawks' compositional sense is remarkably unformalistic and non-geometrical, there are few pretty composed shots and elaborately framed set-ups - *RIO LOBO* uses a screen-size of 1 to 1.85; cinemascope is anathema to Hawks. Yet his frames are full of tensions caused by areas of light and dark, of depth and flatness, of nearness and farness, of sparsity and crowding. His films are, in a sense, fights for lightness, flatness and so on, where film qualities like colour or texture are pushing and straining with each other. *RIO LOBO*, however, is all merger, all flux, no particular visual aspect ever really asserts or controls.

The first three or four shots of the film, for instance, showing the arrival of the train, then the nature of the Union soldiers' business, these shots have tensions between foreground and background which are neutralized almost as soon as they're noticed (by movements within the frame, like the train coming towards the surface of the screen, or the gold carried from front to back of the available screen-space; and by camera movements which draw the eye across a depth of field, like the draw-back from wagon to telegraphist's office). During the train hold-up, switches between subjective and objective points of view which amount to camera on or off the train, are in a sense

John Wayne ▼

switches between foreground and background, and the train's final collision is shot from alarmingly flat undimensional standpoints. During Col. McNally's almost mathematically precise separation from his troop, the soldiers go off of the screen in several different directions, uphill, downhill, east, west, upstream, downstream and McNally never commands our absolute attention at the visual centre of the frames - he's back of the screen, then somewhere near its surface, and when he finally finds himself alone, in a dappled stream, he heads directly away from the camera, not towards it.

Now I have a problem of interpretation here since all these aspects of the merging idea I've taken from the first part of the film - the Civil War sequences - which may have been done by the second-unit under Yakima Canutt. I don't know. But I submit that the rest of the film actually follows the same merging principles, though, of course, things get increasingly more complex till a sort of abstraction of chaos is attained. The important point is that it's not the chaos of a day-dream, of an ageing adventurer full of corn-oil, if you like! More instances of merging, chosen somewhat randomly, all add strength to my argument. In the Confederate cave hide-out and in the Sheriff's office in Blackthorne, the camera looks from a darker interior to brighter exterior - in both cases the visual strain of this dark-light opposition is "relaxed" by the respective appearances of Capt. Cordona on a horse and Shasta on the stage, then it is "lessened" by a mediating component of Wayne in both cases shuffling across the screen, and the whole visual experience is "smoothed out" with floating colours which drain the sequences of any tensions they might have seemed to have had - with browns in the hide-out, and pinks in the office. (In Hawks, colour is used in an interesting way, most often to cancel out certain visual tensions, and to vitiate easy identifications.)

There are very few 'close' close-ups in *RIO LOBO*, so the frame is often full of a number of people, and when this happens no compositional device puts any one at the centre of interest - one's eye can wander over the screen and not be relentlessly drawn to a particular person (of course, the demand of dialogue, plot, drama and characterization do lead the eye somewhere, but in spatial terms this is not necessarily so). Even the rooms themselves seem to enclose similar spaces, like the motel rooms of *RED LINE 7000*, so that both Maria's and Amelita's rooms, and to a lesser but still considerable extent also the Rio Lobo jail, Phillips' place, Dr. Ivor Jones', Ketcham's and the cantina, all mingle in our minds, there being nothing particularly striking in the props of each. Since there is a constant to and fro of people all entering and leaving, there is an unstable weightlessness to the characters. And *RIO LOBO*, more than *EL DORADO*, is a film made up of shadows and encroaching darkness - the following episodes are taking place at night: cat-and-mouse between Union colonel and Confederate captain and sergeant; the campfire between Blackthorne and Rio Lobo; arrival at Rio Lobo; Doc Prior's place, Ketcham's ranch and all the succeeding action till sun-up - in all about half the film.

Now, there are at least two major types of darkness in Hawks - a flat icy sheet of blackness which makes the foreground figures seem like cut-outs; and a foggier blackness which licks at the edges of people and objects. Neither usage is exclusive of the her, but the viewer will notice, for instance, the difference of visual impact between the shots of Pierre Cordona at the campsite between Blackthorne and Rio Lobo, and the sequence outside Doc Prior's - the first is like a stencil, the second is all murkiness. Since Hawks' frames are so self-contained, I find it wrong to relate darkness to a fatalism (as one might with Lang) or any other metaphysical idea; rather, it is an abstraction of a psychological sort - an instability, a state of potential collapse. The flat usage of blackness is subject to collapse because one senses the cut-out figure could just fall through the dark board; the rounded usage of blackness eliminates recognition of foreground and background by denying any middle area between the two. In both cases, darkness isn't the Shadow of Death, but an aspect of the merging principle which links nearly every shot of the film. I say nearly because there are a few shots which I can't see fitting into the pattern I've outlined. Consider the shot of horses galloping from Rocky Ford along by the railway: for a second or two, the frame encloses the space under the horses' bellies and between their legs. This strange, intrusive insert is unexplainable except in terms of either the demands of action and excitement or the "prediction" of Lt. Forsythe's broken neck.

Another isolated shot that seems at first sight not to lead to a merging is the declaration that war is over, in the prison-camp. It is not there just to hurry the plot along - there is a clap of thunder, and it is raining heavily, and rain is what makes the shot so evocative - rain is a kind of total "mixer" unifying everything, merging the small and personal (Capt. Cordona says "Damn, all this for nothing!") with a large and historical event (the Clarion headline reads . **WAR IS OVER**).

What I have done so far, in an imprecise manner, is describe some features of what I take to be the visual style of *RIO LOBO*. These features cannot begin to work on our consciousness, cannot have meaning, without reference to the more obvious activity of the film - what's in the script, how the narrative develops, story structure, characterization and acting, all the thematic preoccupations and so on - but In Hawks this relationship between style and content isn't direct. Hawks is an intuitive, unpretentious film-maker. Filming is a job to be done and enjoyed, actors may extemporize, the emphasis is on a naturalness with no room for hysteria. His style, then, is neither consciously rhetorical nor consciously interpretative, but the accumulative figurative choices he makes when setting up each shot are as much at the behest of an over-riding psychological state as they are of the script, the genre, and so on. It's as if the abstraction is unconsciously reached, in spite of the material.

The current auteur concept of Hawks is really quite primitive when you think about it, though I respect that its "You Tarzan, me Jane" method has a charming simplicity. I know there are going to be forthcoming essays on his gargling with incidents and references to his earlier films (witness the bay and sorrel in Abilene which McNally and Cordona conjure up; and Shasta's saloon-girl past etc.), essays on his sensibility with the western form, essays on Hawks themes as they reappear in *RIO LOBO* - on self respect, the search for identity, group membership and desertions, attitude to history, professionalism, and so on. But the real subject, the underlying concern, and the theme which "factorizes" the other themes, is age, in all its ramifications, in questions of maturity, of wisdom, of dignity, and by comparison with youth. In *RIO LOBO* Hawks does not sentimentalize nor remonstrate about his ageing, or about the ageing process in general; he gives us a self-contained psychological description without larger implications than the conditions of its own poetry.

People in Hawks are seldom related, one doesn't get the impression that the family means much to him. Instead, experience makes the Hawks hero into a potential father-figure. Col. Cord McNally tells his "son", lt. Forsythe, after the young Union soldier jumps from the train - "Ned, your neck's broken". Ned dies two days later, and Cord takes his valedictory words seriously - "Catch 'em, will you?" - so that revenge becomes the dramatic impetus behind the whole of the film. But there is a little ambiguity here, in the relation of the Col. to the Lt.: McNally only mentioned the importance of Forsythe to him twice, the first time when he says he's been with him "since the war began" and the second time when he explains to Cordona and Tuscarora that "a boy I watched grow up" was killed in the robbery they'd perpetrated. The implication is either that McNally had actually brought the young man up, or that it was the war experience which had matured him under McNally's apprenticeship. And when the war is over, McNally is at pains to assure the released Confederates that what they'd done was "an act of war", whereas the "selling of information" by two traitors who'd tipped the other side off about gold shipments was "treason - rotten treachery for money". In other words, wrapped up with any personal motivations which McNally has for revenge, there is the rationale that to betray the group is wrong and impeachable. It transpires that the chief culprit, Sgt. Major Ike Gorman (Ketcham), is shot down by the Rio Lobo sheriff, for just the same motives - that he'd betrayed the group by selling off their assets to save his own skin.

Throughout the film a private responsibility to one's self-respect is never quite distinguished from a public responsibility to the group. This collusion can be seen in the dramatic devices of the plot, wherein McNally can eke out personal revenge and at the same time let the inhabitants of Rio Lobo have their town back; wherein the townsfolk who rise up to the "miracle" of ridding themselves of the crooked gang do so as much out of self-interest as duty and solidarity ("They won't be much help unless they're real good."); and wherein McNally and Phillips achieve a "joking relationship" more through the identification of old men who've watched their "sons" grow up than other loyalties ("Us civilians ain't the fools you Yankees think.")

In the film's avoidance of a strict moral conclusion, Amelita seeks assurances of her "right to kill" the sheriff who'd disfigured her but McNally only recognizes that "someone else would have", harping back to his own motives when he's stressed that she'd have to beat him to it. So, just as ontologically there's a disordered flux of all visual components, so dramatically there's a lack of resolution of conflicts. Individuals, their desires and actions, are judged by their need to make a mark, to assert themselves, on an unpredictable world. In this search for identity, they merge with, are emasculated by their environment. Foreground and background merge.

This "vision" could easily be a hard nihilistic one were it not for the blend of crazy relief Hawks gives to *RIO LOBO*, in his attitudes to ageing and death. McNally is "baby whale" whom Tuscarora could have kissed and whom Shasta finds "comfortable" - he yells "OUCH!" when he's shot in the leg, and he lumbers through a series of gun - and fist-fights. He likes his drink, and in Phillips' shack he finds a bottle that's "not for the young". He jibes Cordona for his youthful chivalry, he can share the irony of Sheriff Cronin who hurts his shoulder when he falls to the floor firing in the Blackthorne bar, and he is consecutively cheated of revenge on Whitey (by Shasta), Ketcham (by Hendricks) and Hendricks (by Amelita). With a few drinks he's warm and relaxed.

Phillips, however, is anything but relaxed, his gestures are gesticulations, his eyes roll, his neck twitches - Jack Elam has rarely given a finer caricature. He is crazy, but eccentric rather than senile, and only really infantile when he plays his jew's harp to annoy others into getting him a drink, like a spoilt child. His maniacal humour is directed to two ends - to poking fun at the group ("You coming with us?", and other jokes he has at the expense of McNally's leadership - "Glad I brought you along, eh?") and to poking fun at death. He shoots at strangers on sight, and all the verbal humour which is directed against Ketcham is in the final analysis connected with his **lack of control** over his thumb on the cocked double-barrelled shot-gun - death comes from not being in control of the environment.

Only to Shasta is death a frightening threat, when she faints at the thought that she's killed Whitey, and when she realizes she's sleeping on the site of an Indian pyre. For Hawks heroes, death is just a fact, after it you count the bodies and the undertaker is there to rub his hands. If anywhere, the dead are "at another gate now, looking for St. Peter", they can be joked about.

Unlike *EL DORADO*, which concentrates on the physical deterioration of ageing, and a violence and pain that suggest despair, *RIO LOBO* is suffused with a more stoical psychological state, a way of seeing which is an abstraction of the thematic sub-stratum. Wollen seems to think that the adventure dramas and the crazy comedies are discrete groups of films in the Hawks oeuvre (4). We should not be thinking in terms of the abacus, but the slide-rule: what are the visual correlates of this tension in **each** film? *RIO LOBO* works because the tension of men controlling the environment which is the central conflict of the adventure drama, and of environment controlling the men which is the central conflict of the crazy comedies, is visually conveyed **in both cases** by the merging process I outlined earlier. The way to encompass both conflicts is to have them merge, and in more senses than one, the film is a **realization** of ambiguity and chaos as facts of life. *RIO LOBO* achieves a state of grace, neatly epitomized in the credit shots of a serenely picked guitar.

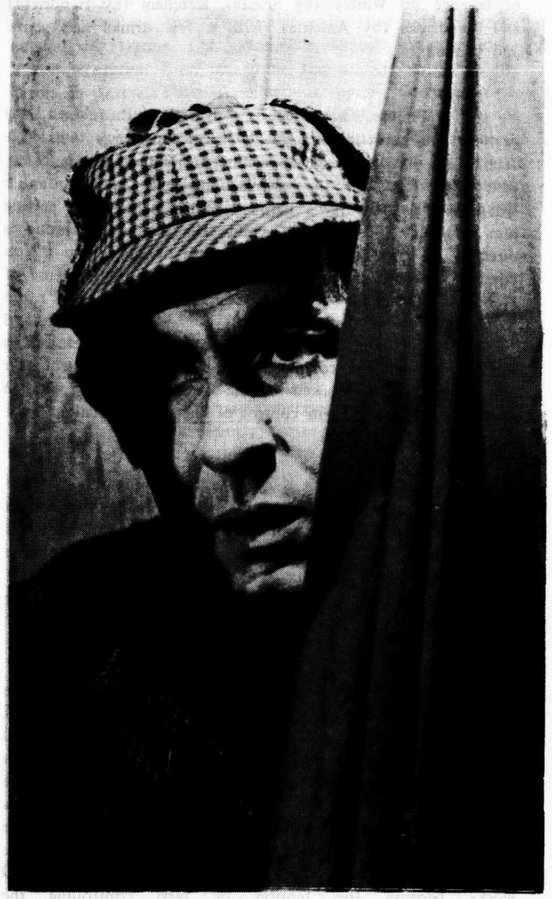
Mike WALLINGTON

1. *Howard Hawks* by J.C. Missiaen, Classiques du Cinéma no.21, p.167, lines 10-11, Editions Universitaires 1966.

2. For an intelligent, but slimly documented rebuttal of Wood, see Alan Lovell's excellent papers in *Screen* Vol.II No. 4/5 pp.76-88 (The Common Pursuit of True Judgement)

3. There are other problems connected with any visual analysis of film, e.g. the "intentionality argument" (which the surrealists scotched 40 years ago) and the fact that we see a slightly different film from our fellow critics.

4. *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* by Peter Wollen, Secker & Warburg 1969 pp.93-4.



the private life of Sherlock Holmes

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES may possibly be Wilder's finest movie; the achievements that it represents is all the more remarkable because emanating from a director who seemed to have gone down, thrashing futilely, in the flux of the sixties. The metamorphosis is however, in the nature of the cinema, not in the personality; the hysteric and insidious nihilism has been transmuted into a noble scepticism, in which the folly of the world is proportionate, and a capacity for good revealed. The response which *SHERLOCK HOLMES* elicits, far from the stifling nullity experienced in *THE APARTMENT*, or *ONE, TWO, THREE* is heightened because its origin is deeply embedded in the organic nature of the movie. The world-view that it expresses arises from the conflict between the individual and forces which represent an encroaching dispossession of individuality, but the dialectic is from *within*; it arises from the relation of character and environment rather than the imposed personality of the director which starkly dominates every frame of a movie such as *ONE, TWO, THREE*. "Nobody's perfect"; that recurrent theme of Wilder has achieved a heightened resonance through the inception of the moral representation into the mise-en-scene.

The movie commences with the opening of the bank-vault in which has been stored, for posterity, the familiar collection of objects which symbolize the legendary detective; the deer-stalker, the pipe, the syringe. But Wilder intends a double perspective on these things; their nostalgic value is accompanied by a feeling that they represent the totality of Holmes' existence, to which the individual has become reduced. The sentiment is reinforced by the extraordinary symbol which embodies the stultifying existence of 221B Baker Street; the wheezing skeletonic contraption that inhales and exhales cigarette smoke for the purposes of a futile experiment that Holmes is conducting concerning the individual natures of various kinds of ash, in order to pass the time.

Wilder's concentration on the object is related to the theme of appearance and reality that permeates the movie. It is Holmes' confusion in the area of the value of appearances that precipitates the acid conclusion. The superb example of this is the set of Baker Street itself which, with its evocation of the fog-bound world of Victorian London, is perfectly manufactured; its prime virtue is its deliberately nostalgic quality. Similarly, the Diogenes Club, with its dormant, stagnant facade, which occupied such a peripheral position in the original stories, has, in the universe of Wilder, become the centre of the machinations of the British Secret Service, presided over by Holmes' sinister brother Mycroft. Four diminutive figures dressed in schoolboy clothes are in fact middle-aged dwarfs. The group of Trappist monks that travel up to Scotland on the train with Holmes and Watson are German agents. The Inverness castle undergoing reconstruction for reasons of preservation is a submarine base. The mythical Loch Ness monster is none other than a prototype submarine, being tested by the British. In one of the opening scenes, which takes place during a performance of "Swan Lake" in the Covent Garden opera house, the fatuous Dr. Watson (Colin Blakely), has insistently repeated to an extremely bored Holmes, (Robert Stephens), that the swan gliding across the back of the stage is, in fact, a model. But it is Holmes' blindness to the ambiguity of appearances that will render him, at the end of the movie, utterly helpless and static; his insistence on free agency only further implicates him in a situation well beyond his control.

It is the detective's infatuation with the female German spy masquerading as Gabrielle Valladon that determines his decision to continue with the case despite the threatening disapprobation of Mycroft. With typical Wilderian irony, the symbol of her gentility, her delicate parasol, is equivocal in as far as it is the instrument that she employs to send coded messages to her fellow agents. It also becomes the symbol of her deceptive professionalism, equating with the familiar iconographical features of Holmes' existence; Wilder shows this in her final scene when, escorted away from Holmes and Watson by Mycroft and the police, who have realized her treachery all along, she manages to transmit a last 'au revoir' to the detective as the carriage disappears through a wood in the distance. At last, the meaning of the objects which surround Holmes, in relation to his individual, emotional life becomes clear; it is his professional capacities which have stunted him. Because of his professional mistrust, he has erected a barrier of frigidity around him; the first time that this is lowered results in a true deception. With the delicate irony of the final parting, Wilder manages to convey the loss implicit in the departure, the rupture of a potential relationship.

From the opening scene, Wilder demonstrates how far Holmes' relationship with Gabrielle is connected with Time; her daguerreotype is shown to be placed inside his watch when it is removed from the vault. The consequences of the relationship demonstrate Holmes' inability to seize the time, to live out the individual moments of his life to their true conclusion. Ultimately, Gabrielle's exposure over, Holmes must play out his charade to the end.

The whole trajectory of the movie can be seen as an attempt to lure Holmes out from his attitude of eremetic professionalism. In the scenes in 221B Baker Street, the camera is almost always situated in the communal sitting-room; it never once enters Holmes' own room, and the audience only glimpses occasionally the mysterious interior. Finally, Holmes returns to his solitude and his cocaine, after hearing of Gabrielle's execution overseas, and Watson, powerless to prevent this retreat, returns to the fatuous mythicizing of his friend in his journal. What distinguishes Wilder's movie in the treatment of the main theme is that the sense of disalignment between free agency and the play of exterior forces is created wholly from the organic mise-en-scene, rather than the over-bearing presence of a preconceived attitude which many of the director's previous films have exemplified. In the sequences where Holmes, Gabrielle and Watson bicycle from one Scottish castle to another, Wilder makes excellent use of the large zoom-lens, homing in deliberately on the moving figures, as if they were being observed by a malign presence, which indeed they are. Ultimately for Wilder, characters who attempt to determine their own fates are tricked; their freedom is only a more insidious repression. But, in *SHERLOCK HOLMES*, he views their attempts with a delicate and noble irony, that arises as a result of a genuine engagement with the material of the film itself. It is the genuine engagement that breeds a deeper response on the behalf of the audience.

Peter LLOYD

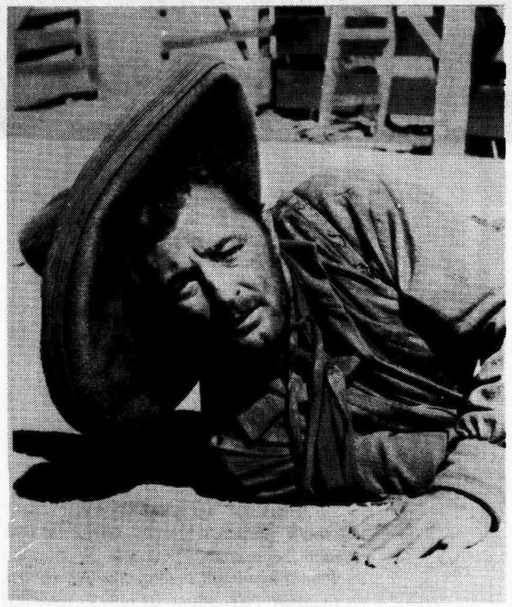
Genevieve Page Robert Stephens

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (GB, 1970) dir.: Billy Wilder, scr.: B.W. and I.A.L. Diamond, mus.: Miklos Rosza; Robert Stephens (Sherlock Holmes), Colin Blakeley (Dr. Watson), Genevieve Page (Gabrielle Valladon), Christopher Lee (Mycroft Holmes)

Wonderful Country

A highly personal American director whose work reveals social conditioning as a focal point of thematic unity, Robert Parrish's subjects are human alienation and national identity. His attitude towards them, his personal vision of life, and the way this generates his style and technique are shown beautifully in *THE WONDERFUL COUNTRY* but also *CRY DANGER* (1951), *THE PURPLE PLAIN* (1955) and *IN THE FRENCH STYLE* (1963). Parrish's protagonists have repudiated their own sources, cut themselves off from their family, society or inheritance. In a painful, agonized existence of intolerable isolation, sexual unhappiness, sordidness, and violence, their individual identity and meaning of existence are obscured. The hero's ultimate acceptance of his social heritage, therein finding his true identity, peace within himself and integration in society has a general significance. The plight of the Parrish hero is that he is a prisoner of his national heritage.

The hero of *THE WONDERFUL COUNTRY*, Martin Brady (Robert Mitchum), a renegade and killer with all the physical characteristics of a Mexican, is seen at the very beginning of the film crossing the Rio Grande and returning to his native country, the U.S., to buy contraband arms in Texas (many years earlier Brady had defected to Mexico after killing his father's murderer). Embodied in the ambiguity of Brady's identity is Parrish's conviction that personal identity is essentially linked to national or racial attributes. The only course for Brady is the restoration of his American citizenship, and in the end, he comes to a definite acceptance of his national identity, turning away in repugnance from Mexico and regarding himself finally as an American. Each crossing of the U.S.-Mexican border marks a different stage in process of Brady discovering his own nature. The opening sequence shows him returning to the U.S., the pull of his ruthlessly suppressed identity still strong inside him even though he has lived in Mexico for most of his life and regards himself as a Mexican. Later, Brady must run again, as a result of an involuntary killing, the consequence of his past way of life, and again his only haven is the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. Re-entering Mexico, he is torn by the full and anguished extent of his conflicts over on the one hand, his 'lost' American identity and a return to that of an alien race, Mexico, and on the other, his regained freedom. The mood of the opening scenes is one of alienation and inner despair with Brady not holding any hope of finding a place in the society he is revisiting. The film ends of a note of American idealisation, redemption and reconciliation, his country rescuing Brady from his plight.



Robert Mitchum

The hero's moral regeneration, his national consciousness and eventual adjustment to American life is stimulated by his falling in love with Julie London's independent-minded, sensuous and solumn Ellen Colton. Her love for Brady is perfectly consistent with the sense that they are both in different ways exiles. She is married to an army officer, estranged from her husband, childless, despising the circumstances of army life and her physical surroundings. Brady's love for Ellen forces a self-awareness that eventually results in him relinquishing the values he has lived by, converting to her ideals and needs, the climax of the film.

To go back to the beginning, which in itself is very elegiac and sardonic, as Brady rides down the main street of El Puerto, a small adobe brick Texas border town, his horse is thrown by a tumbleweed and Brady breaks a leg. Gradually, he is absorbed into American life during his convalescence, falling in love and forming personal relationships of lesser importance, until he becomes the spectre of the person he would have been if he hadn't fled to Mexico. But Brady's is neither an instantaneous nor a total abandonment of his Mexican allegiance.

Before his dual loyalties are reconciled, in self-defence Brady kills the man who has murdered a helpless friend, and flees back across the Rio Grande. The Mexican border is a vital feature of the film, establishing one of Parrish's major themes: the deep and fundamental ideological differences between nations. *THE WONDERFUL COUNTRY* begins and ends with Brady crossing the border to America, the Rio Grande therein providing a symmetrical pattern within the film, being a metaphor for the disintegrative forces within Brady himself, existing indeed in symbolic relation to him.

On his return to Mexico, which forms the physical and social background for the remainder of the film, Brady is entangled in the struggle for power between his master Governor Castro and the governor's brother General Castro, Brady becoming increasingly out of sympathy with their political corruption. Governor Castro is very indignant at Brady's Gringo appearance and holds him responsible for the loss of the gun shipment. Back in the governor's service as gunman and bodyguard, Brady is virtually a prisoner, torn between his Mexican personation and his reviviscent American impulses.

Brady and Ellen meet again at the fiesta at Chinora celebrating the forthcoming joint U.S.-Mexican military action against the Apaches. But Ellen rejects him so long as he upholds violence, the gun being the primary attachment in his life and a symbol of the values that keep them apart. When he disobeys an order to murder General Castro, Brady finds himself finally trapped by the confusions in the way he lives, an outcast, a fugitive in Mexico as well as the U.S., the conflicts within him coming to a head.

The last episode presents Brady, drifting in almost total isolation, being harassed by the Mexican and American authorities. He eventually encounters Major Colton who is fatally wounded by the Apaches. As a result of these circumstances Brady decides to return to the U.S. Major Colton dies on the journey. After a battle against the Apaches, and a final showdown, Brady is forced to shoot his thorough-bred stallion (named Lagrimas which means tears in Spanish), a gift from the Castros' which represents his last remaining tie with Mexico. In the very last shot he lays down his gun and returns morally regenerated, to Ellen Colton and a wholly fresh start in the U.S.: the hero's final redemption opening the way to the restoration of his American citizenship and to future happiness.

The whole tone of isolation, alienation and misery of Brady and Ellen's past, and the brilliantly sharp colour photography and design spring from Robert Parrish's dispassionate observation of his characters. We are at all time outside Brady, as much as we are in Kelly, the prostitute heroine of *THE NAKED KISS*, Samuel Fuller's stark, reproachful and entirely opposing interpretation of the same basic theme of American identity. At all times Brady is distanced; viewed living in relation to two cultures at eternal enmity with the other, and treated with Parrish's characteristic objectivity, seriousness and dignity.

Andrew MILNE

THE WONDERFUL COUNTRY (USA, 1959) dir.: Robert Parrish, scr.: Robert Ardrey, from a novel by Tom Lea, phot.: Floyd Crosby Alex Philipps, col.: Technicolor, mus.: Alex North; Robert Mitchum (Martin Brady), Julie London (Ellen Colton), Gary Merrill (Major Colton), Pedro Armendariz (Cipriano Castro), Charles McGraw (Doc Stovall)

Joel McCrea in Robert Parrish's SAN FRANCISCO STORY

EISENSTEIN

STYLE IN IVAN THE TERRIBLE

Since there seems to be some vague consensus over Eisenstein: which is that, within the body of his work, the earlier work is to be preferred over the later and, if anything, Part I of *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* over Part II, let me begin this review by stating, as an opinion which I will try to substantiate, that Eisenstein's great achievement in the cinema is precisely in *IVAN* and above all in the second part, *THE BOYAR'S PLOT.*

True, *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* is not a very inviting work - but congeniality does not constitute a touchstone of artistic merit. If *IVAN* offends and disconcerts, Lichtenberg's aphorism has a certain appositeness - "When a book and a head collide, and there is a hollow sound, is it always the fault of the book?"

Eisenstein's sin in this work is that he supplies things which an audience has not asked for and fails to provide a number of things which they feel they have a right to expect. *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* offends against naturalistic criteria by its quite extraordinary degree of stylisation, in the costumes, sets, style of acting, editing and yet it does not "validate" itself by utilising this stylisation to convey symbolic meanings but appears to employ these expressive devices purely for their own sake. In fact, rapidly surveying Eisenstein's career as a whole it would be easy to conclude that his commitment to an agit-prop revolutionary cinema was superficial and that his deepest loyalties were to ritual and traditon - the religious ceremonies in *OLD AND NEW,* for example, are undeniably impressive despite the fact that they constitute the principal target of social criticism. Even here, of course, there need not be a contradiction: we may say that Eisenstein's greatness lies in the fact that he can at once show this impressiveness and at the same time expose its mystifying role, that it is impossible to do the one without doing the other. But there nevertheless does remain a puzzle in the whole pattern of Eisensteins's development, which appears as a daunting mixture of consistency and contradictoriness. Is it Eisenstein's theory that is consistent, his practise that is contradictory or vice versa? The difficulty in answering this question resides in the

"What film really demands is external action and not introspective psychology"

Brecht

"A theatre built on psychological foundations is as certain to collapse as a house built on sand. On the other hand, a theatre which relies on physical elements is at very least assured of clarity."

Meyerhold

"Wherever there is art, there too is stylisation."

V. Bryusov

"The scenic picture, as in any great art, must be very schematic."

Enrico Corradini, praising Appia's **Tristan and Isolde**

"To 'stylise' a given period or phenomenon means to employ every possible means of expression in order to reveal the inner synthesis of that period or phenomenon."

Meyerhold

fact that there are too many variables. With Brecht, for example, it is possible to relate a clear-cut theory to a well-defined method of theatrical production and to posit a distinction between text and performance, but with Eisenstein, to use an appropriately cinematic word, even these certainties dissolve.

Undoubtedly Eisenstein went through periods where he ran into some kind of an impasse and seemed unable to resolve the problems he had created for himself - but far from discrediting him we surely should admire him for his courage. For we ought to recognise both that they were resolved and that they were posed on a far higher level than the criticism that purports to deal with them - as though the problems of *Capital* Vol. III could be highlighted from the perspective of Adam Smith. Eisenstein is judged against a series of interlocking presuppositions of bourgeois culture, which he along with just about every creative figure in the poetry, music, painting, theatre and cinema of the early twentieth century, quite explicitly rejected. Even if we think this rejection wrong or misconceived we ought at least to make the effort to understand the reasons behind it.

The montage of quotations at the head of this review is designed to pre-empt characteristic reactions to *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* by showing not only how widespread was the support for procedures of this kind in the reaction against bourgeois naturalism but also to indicate that for them the methods we find alien were taken to be absolutely characteristic of all great art. But, as we all know, by a great irony, bourgeois naturalism became socialist realism, and Lukacs unites with Western critics in accepting 19th century fiction as constituting an artistic norm, just at the moment when it was precisely that normativeness that was being called in question. For bourgeois literature and bourgeois criticism was reductionist: on the one hand it predicated the universal tragedy of bankruptcy, on the other it rejected everything that did not fall within its purview (the Shakespeare criticism of E.E. Stoll) as ridiculous and improbable. For its opponents, the pretensions of this outlook to universality were as absurd as Hegel's

rationalisation of the Prussian state. Thus the search for the modern is invariably linked with a deliberate regression to more primitive forms, which are more universal just because they are not characterised by realist/illusionist assumptions or by a copious, undiscriminating specificity. It is not simply a matter of different styles but of a whole new outlook, with political, philosophical, aesthetic and psychological implications. The table below indicates some of these differences.

19th C	20thC
unself-conscious-ness of work of art	self-conscious-ness of work of art
organism	mechanism
co-ordination / integration	conflict / separation
content determines form	form determines content
natural	arbitrary
illusion	style
subjective world	objective world
specificity - movement from particular to general	universality - movement from general to particular
empiricism	gestalt theory

Obviously, a table of this kind is necessarily schematic and needless to say, the fact that theoretical questions are posed in a certain way is not to be taken as an indication that that way is correct - on the contrary - only that this terminology may be fruitful in distinguishing between, say, Stravinsky and Mahler, Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, Joyce and George Eliot, Pirandello and Ibsen, Picasso and Constable, Eisenstein and .... well, Bazin.

For clearly Bazin still represents the principal source of opposition to the cinema of Eisenstein. As it happens, I believe that there is a certain element of truth in Renoir's criticisms of montage and that Eisenstein, quite independently arrived at similar conclusions. However, Bazin is the kind of critic whose intuitions are often better than their logic - he knows that something is wrong but cannot quite put his finger on it. For his actual remarks are ill-grounded and incorrectly formulated. Bazin has essentially three objections to montage, though in the end they all come to much the same thing:

(1) it does violence to reality

(2) the images cease to have any inherent meaning, because their meaning is determined by the relationship between them. They lose their ambiguity

(3) the images tend to become symbolic and abstract.

Here, at once, we see Bazin's problems as a critic. For him the Art/Reality confusion is not a question to be resolved but a basic assumption: hence he is unable to formulate any conception of art at all. Secondly, his thinking is dominated by what I will call "the intrinsic fallacy" - that is, the tendency to assume that **all** the characteristics of a given phenomenon are intrinsic, and a consequent inability to distinguish between those aspects that are genuinely specific and those which are accidental or contingent (this, by the way, is a fundamental characteristic of bourgeois thought). Thus, Bazin assumes that all images have an intrinsic meaning and rejects all attempts on the part of the director to manipulate him, yet reserves for the spectator the right to come to any conclusions he likes about what he sees on the screen. How can the images have an intrinsic meaning and at the same time mean anything? These conundrums can only be disposed of by making the necessary assumption.

(a) that the director does indeed determine the significance of what we see.

(b) that the notion of inherent or intrinsic meaning serves no purpose since it is self-contradictory and, if taken, seriously, leaves neither artist nor spectator with any role.

Bazin defends "ambiguity" against the tyrannical artist (though its place in his scheme of things is not at all clear). He wishes to preserve ambiguity of meaning, in the sense not so much of "more than one meaning" as of "any meaning", yet he resents ambiguity in the status of the image which is introduced by the principle of montage. At bottom what Bazin recognises very clearly in the silent cinema, and therefore refuses to acknowledge, is that the image, as image, necessarily has referential, representative, metaphorical and symbolic connotations. But Bazin, by burying his head in the sand, will deny this.

All the same, Bazin has a point - though it is a point not so much about montage as about the silent cinema in general - which is that the silent cinema functioned on an excessively high level of generality and abstraction (Chaplin is the great exception). But Bazin again posits this as intrinsic to montage, when it only happens to be part of a larger problematic of which the use of montage is also a part. Clearly there are other factors involved.

The silent cinema was trying to reach an international mass audience, that was not always highly educated, and it had therefore to concentrate on communicating universal human feelings, - love, hate, fear, hope, despair, joy, sorrow - stripped as far as possible of particular distinctions of time, place and circumstance. If it was, in some sense, a proletarian cinema it was very little of a Marxist one. Human attitudes were everything, material circumstances nothing. In the Soviet Union these tendencies were reinforced by a sense of the universal message of the Russian Revolution and of the universality of the human condition (under capitalism, oppression or domination), by an emphasis on the masses over the individual. The way in which tendencies towards symbolisation and representativeness are linked with a concern for universality, and expressed through a movement from the general to the particular is exemplified in *THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN.*

Everything about Eisenstein's construction of the Odessa Steps sequence arises out of his determination to give it a higher representativeness, a general significance. Thus, in reaction against bourgeois art, we return to the familiar distinction between the brazen world of reality and the golden world of art. Neither the Odessa steps themselves or

the pram are symbols - but, since the massacre did not actually occur there but elsewhere, they are expressive devices used by Eisenstein to intensify the meaning of the scene. Thus, it would be perfectly true to say of this sequence that it does not portray a reality at all but shows, as a simulacrum, in a formal way, the conflict between the forces of law and order and the people, between violence and helplessness. The formal rigidity of the movement of the soldiers down the steps is contrasted with the discontinuous haphazard progress of the pram. And Eisenstein chooses the individuals he shows for their representativeness. They stand for "the Russian people", for "motherhood" and so on. They are concrete universals and not universal particulars.

Is Eisenstein's procedure legitimate? There can be no simple answer to this question in general terms. All artistic methods have their risks. In bourgeois art the danger is that the specific will be endowed with a bogus universality, in Eisensteinian cinema that particular will become completely impoverished through its need to serve as a vehicle for further meanings. And it is certainly the case that with Eisenstein the problem of the particular and the general reached an acute form in *BEZHIN MEADOW* where the attempt to relate an individual story to a public theme only succeeded in degrading, vulgarising and melodramatising them both - on falling into both traps simultaneously.

Bazin, in this conjucture, would defend the integrity of the image by proposing a return to reality and the abandonment of stylisation, by asking that the director refrain from imposing an interpretation on the spectator by making the image infinitely suggestive. Eisenstein's solution is exactly the reverse: he defends the integrity of the image by **increasing** the level of stylisation and thereby making it less available, less malleable and adaptable to the interpretative fancies of the spectator. Through his formalisation, Eisenstein insists on the **quidditas** of the film as an aesthetic object - that it is **this** and not another thing. In *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* nothing is hinted at; everything is directly conveyed by formal methods.

In *IVAN THE TERRIBLE PART I,* Eisenstein gave the **Gesamtkunstwerk**, the "perfect fusion of all media of expression, in close mutual subordination" (Appia) a new meaning. In this work all artistic means are subordinated to a single end. As Eisenstein himself put it:

> "The grandeur of our subject called for monumental means of presentation. Details were pushed into the background and everything was subordinated to the principle idea of the might of Russia and the struggle to make it a great power."

The spectator is distanced from the action by means of stylisation (cf. Brecht and common interest in oriental theatre) - he is forced to recognise that the experience is alien and that he cannot easily draw lessons or conclusions from it. Prokofiev's music, of course, plays an important part and musical analogies are everywhere relevant. *IVAN PART I,* for example, recalls the programme of Liszt's *Les Preludes,* in which the conflicts, hesitations and tendencies towards pessimism in the hero are finally overcome in a triumphant conclusion, in which "the trumpet sounds the assault" and drives the hero into "the thick of the battle." This progression is repeated and amplified in *IVAN THE TERRIBLE.* The first phase leads up to the cry "to Kazan", the second to the conclusion of Part I, "We are going to Moscow." The third phase, Part II, has the same form, only in the mode of irony. Its meaning is qualitatively different.

It would be easy to denigrate the picture by describing Ivan as a Hamlet figure, but this is to misconstrue the nature of Eisenstein's concerns. For Eisenstein, Ivan, is a figure ahead of his time, and yet of it; his struggles arise out of his attempt to transcend the world and the preconceptions of the world in which he finds himself. Thus, Ivan's attitude towards the church is contradictory: on the one had belief in his own divine mission gives him confidence; on the other hand, the church, its alliance with the boyars; its mystifying role constitutes an obstacle to the realisation of his plans which he intuitively recognises. Ivan is a man determined to transform reality and to make use of new social forces to achieve that end. His goals are not purely subjective, but find reinforcement in the objective world, in the support of the people and of the "new men."

Gesture in *IVAN PART I* assumes great significance because it is a form of assertion, an act of definition and an act of will (the debate with the Kazan envoy). Eisenstein's theme is conveyed by compositional means: the disruptive role of the boyars and Euphrosyne is suggested by the asymmetry created by eyes looking directly into the camera at close range; the unity represented by Ivan (in some sense symbol of the Hegelian "idea") by making him the focal point of elaborate pictorial compositions. Ivan's struggle to master his world is shown through postures of submission and dominance within the frame, a progressive movement is created through the use of montage within elaborately extended episodes.

THE BOYARS' PLOT transcends and yet depends upon its predecessor for its interpretation. But there is no "meaning" to expressed only an action, employing certain formal procedures, certain symmetries, absences as well as presences. Part II only has significance insofar as it is checked against Part I. For one thing, there is a radical reorientation in the significance of gesture, which no longer expresses meaning but its absence. Ivor Montague asks "Why swallow the script and not its embodiment?" - yet even Stalinists could follow the significance of the mise-en-scene. For in Part II, the people are absent. What made Ivan different from those he was plotting against was his relationship with the people and when he says in Part I that the people support him we see them in their thousands. He says it again in Part II but we see no one. Ivan, and his "new men" have lost their larger social role and hence become equivalent to those they struggle against. If *IVAN I* is musical, *IVAN II* is theatrical and Ivan's fondness for gesture, ritual, theatricalism is exhibited as nihilism. Ivan's conflict with the world has ended in both victory and solipsism, nothing has reality or meaning for him except himself - and perhaps not even that. For Eisenstein's flashback to Ivan's childhood strongly suggests that in destroying Vladimir, Ivan is also destroying himself; in his maturity avenging himself in symbolic form on the innocence that made him vulnerable, Ivan becomes triumphant only at the price of ceasing to stand for anything.

The scene in the church in which Ivan vows to become "Ivan the Terrible" is perhaps the most remarkable episode in the whole history of the cinema: its complex interrelation of different levels provides the most convincing refutation of the aesthetics of Bazin. For Eisenstein shows how intimately related are "reality" and symbolisation - that reality not merely "is" but is also how we perceive it, or what stance we adopt towards it. The faces of Shadrach, Mishak and Abednego in the church have no referent, but are interpreted as having one by Euphorsyne who links their situation with hers and Ivan with Nebuchadnezzar. The analogy breaks down when the boy laughs and says "Is that the terrible heathen Tsar?" but this apparent relapse into the naturalistic level is immediately undercut as Ivan says "Henceforth I shall be such a person." Here human beings are shown in a dialectical relationship with their environment and not as "belonging" in a God-give natural world.

THE BOYARS' PLOT suggests two parallels: one between Ivan and Stalin, the other between Ivan and Christ. But there can be no question that Ivan is Stalin, the film remains true to itself and its own subject. But we can draw this conclusion if we wish. (There is no question either of inherent meaning or of ambiguity). The second parallel is indeed indicated within the continuity of the action. Kurbsky's kiss recalls the kiss of Judas and the final image in which Ivan on his throne and an innocent ikon of Christ clearly underlines the distinction between "goodness and mercy" and the worldly power that turns this phrase into a sham. But it is only right that the image should undercut Ivan's struggle to monopolise all value.

IVAN THE TERRIBLE then, is both an affirmation and a critique of gesture; it shows gesture as meaning and gesture as sham. The work's authenticity lies in its faithfulness to its own concerns; precisely in its not positing itself as a polysignificant reality-illusion, Eisenstein is the supreme validation of style in the cinema.

David MORSE

IVAN THE TERRIBLE Pt. II (THE BOYARS' PLOT) (USSR , 1946) dir.: Sergei M. Eisenstein, scr.: S. M. E., phot.: Andrei Moskvin (interiors) Eduard Tisse (exteriors), mus.: Sergei Prokofiev, lyr.: Vladimir Lugovsky; Nikolai Cherkasov (Ivan), Ludmila Tselikovskaya (Tsarina), Michail Nasvanov(Kurbsky) , Andrei Abrikosov (Kolychev, subsequently Abbot Philip)

book reviews

RAOUL WALSH by Michel Marmin

Cinéma d'Aujourd'hui No 63 Seghers Paris 1970

It is evidently a matter of publishers' policy that the Seghers series of monographs contains a large number of books whose authors disclaim critical intentions. Pierre Lherminier, the editor of the series, wrote the volume on Vigo and made it immediately clear that he was not writing criticism, but writing, rather, to express his affection for the films in question (the 'labour of love' aspects of the series often have useful results in fine research work which forms or accompanies the texts - the marvellous volume on Sennett is exemplary in this sense). One sees the aptness, in view of this, of employing the MacMahoniste writers, who habitually don't set out to provide analyses or frameworks for discrimination within a body of work, but instead to set up monuments to the directors they admire. Their magazine *Présence du Cinéma* consists of a series of such monuments, so imposing that one must come to terms with them before one can move on - and one must, I think, move on.

Michael Mourlet's book on de Mille in the Seghers series offers a *note liminaire* which makes clear some of the basic attitudes: the critic ought to convey, by the poetic use of language, the feeling aroused by the work in question; to take up one page is nevertheless better than to take up four, and it might even be better to say nothing; the accumulation of knowledge is worse than useless unless it has a function; criticism should be 'dynamic' leading the reader to make discoveries; most criticism is parasitical, and a work of art properly achieved needs no commentator; the work is what matters, and explication can only teach the apt but ignorant young; explication of themes is a waste of time; poor criticism is symptomatic of our period's lack of creative energy. Even if (as I do) one accepts the validity of much of this, the splendid gestures it gives rise to can still seem inadequate. My response to the Right as to the Left in much current 'criticism' is the same: if there is bad criticism one should have the nerve not to abandon the practice of criticism but rather to practice it better. Certainly the Left has, in effect, abdicated, producing no significant aids to discrimination and evaluation. Between the rhetoric of the Right and the paralysing, extreme rejection of rhetoric on the Left it should be possible to pursue a responsible and creative course.

Marmin presents Walsh in such a way that, he hopes, the impact of our own discovery of the work will not be lessened, while our appetite for it is nevertheless stimulated. He presents himself as 'a happy lover' refusing precision, a hierarchical organisation, chronology and any extraneous justification or systematic framework. So what is one to make of it? Marmin's basic assumptions are almost all implicit: one must observe what is deliberately absent - in this sense it is typically MacMahoniste. He throws out, though, indications of his controlling view of Walsh and the American cinema in a seemingly random manner, so that one is a little taken aback when the work does finally hold together. He presents a view of civilisation immediately derived from Barres: that after its creative height (the European High Middle Ages, America in the present century) there follows a period of aestheticism, and then a final stage of decadence characterised by archivism and an extreme lack of creativity. This might seem odd in view of Marmin's use of Corneille and Nietzsche (for instance), but one gathers that such figures have a kind of gratuitous nobility and have to define themselves in confronting the mediocrity of their times. Marmin observes the creativity of America, then, from the standpoint of one looking outwards from the decadence around him to the freshness of a healthy civilisation.

There is of course, no way to prove him wrong in all this, but one cannot help responding to his genuine perception of the splendour of the Walsh oeuvre and the frankness of his refusal to offer explication or justification. The book is bound to be derided, however, for its lack of systematic presentation, its refusal to offer support for the views expressed, and its cheerful acceptance of American domination. In the January issue of *Cinéma 71* Guy Hennebelle is found worrying about the threat to European national cultures posed by American domination, and it should be obvious that they **are** worth worrying about. Marmin is a fatalist, as anyone must be who conceives of his times as mediocre: he would find such scruples to be evidence of a weak refusal to accept life as it is. His view of superior acts, as gratuitous demonstrations of human worth, offers no scope for any act conceived of not as gratuitous, but as an expression of concern for the selection of what is worthwhile in native traditions - and Marmin himself acts, in this book, in a way related to this, or he would not have bothered to write the book at all, nor to have shaped it with quotations from European writers (though he sees not so much traditions as individuals). It seems certain that he has an educative intention, to which, however, his posturing is irrelevant.

At every point, he knows how provocative he is being. His stress on domination, conquest and possession as Walsh themes is calculated to enrage. One would be better disposed towards this aspect of the book if only it were correct as criticism of the films, but it is surely and significantly mistaken. Possession is precisely what Walsh heroes do not aspire to, unless it is possession of self-consistency or self-knowledge, of dignity and self-esteem. In short, Walsh devotes himself to the values of the individual, in himself; the important victories in his work are not imperialistic, but those of men finding a way to live **within** the prevailing emphasis on possession and conquest which is simply present in those around him. Clearly, Walsh's work would not have the character it has if America were not the most powerful nation on earth, but this merely shows us the inevitable similarity of his own situation to that of his favoured characters. His attitude is that of a man preserving his integrity and his nerve no matter what collapses of integrity and nerve he sees around him. Walsh is impossible to characterise in detailed political terms from the evidence of his work: in every case he preserves his humorous detachment and maintains his impersonal clarity and fairness.

Marmin's observations are sometimes very sound, in spite of his occasional puerility and his foolish emphasis on *MURDER INC.* That film lacks any evidence of genuine involvement on Walsh's part - I don't ask for personal motifs, of course, but for his habitual clarity and simplicity. How can this supremely logical artist not have been offended by the grinding mechanism of the flashbacks and by the remnants of Windust's incompetence? Perhaps Marmin hangs on to this film as the only **obvious** evidence of precisely **social** responsibility in Walsh: if so, it suggests a poor understanding of the moral discriminations characteristic of the director.

Walsh is more than Marmin knows, or wants him to be. Marmin's reticence about his relative evaluations of the films might indicate an aristocratic confidence or an extreme inability, and how are we to tell? Faced by a body of films of notable concreteness and lucidity one shouldn't offer diffuse generalisations and think one has done enough. That said, Marmin does communicate an honest sense of Walsh's distinctiveness and of his commanding position in the American cinema over half a century of its development.

John M. SMITH

CLAUDE CHABROL by Robin Wood and Michael Walker

Movie Paperback Studio Vista London 1970

The publication of Studio Vista's Movie Paperback on Chabrol provokes several questions, both about its author and subject (as well as allowing the reader to sigh with relief at the series' recovery from a recent lapse in its general standard of seriousness and intelligence). Robin Wood and Michael Walker are jointly responsible for the book, and I imply no slight to Michael Walker in centring my review of the book on Robin Wood's contribution; many of their assumptions and qualities are shared and Mr. Walker's accounts of Chabrol's most recent films seem to me to be distinguished models of personal and impressionistic criticism; coherent, informative and illuminating, in which the deployment of references to contexts outside of the specific film under discussion invests his vocabulary of analysis and evaluation with specific and suggestive meanings.

The core of their account of Chabrol is an uneasy and shifting confrontation of Chabrol's "cynicism", or as Robin Wood puts it, "the problem of affirmation". Mr. Wood is commendably explicit in his enunciation of criteria, there is none of the unsatisfactoriness of the Hawks book where words like "organic" and "wholeness" had to bear an enormous weight, unsupported by definitive contextual references or systematic exposition. But the conjunction the book enacts between "affirmation" as a sine qua non of excellence, and intelligent exposition and celebration of Chabrol's work dooms the development of their analysis to inconsistency and misconception.

Michael Walker voices explicitly their shared assumption of an individualistic and anthropo-centric position; of cynicism he says:

> "as a developed habit of mind and sensibility it could only be stunting."

Thus the logic of their shared position leads the writers to describe Chabrol's development as one towards a recognition and affirmation of value in human relationships eschewing the bleaker view of earlier films. Robin Wood's account of *LE SCANDALE* follows this pattern, he describes it as a "drive towards purgation" with a moral centre in Paul, who "achieves at least partial clarity and triumph over his confusion and his alcoholic degeneration", with the film's amazing last shot, "wilful and perverse." The last shot surely crystallizes the experiential process of the film in the same way as that justly recogonised as of seminal importance by Michael Walker, in *LA FEMME INFIDELE.*

The perversity is entirely Robin Wood's and not Chabrol's; though Wood's statement is mitigated by the characteristic honesty with which he voices his response to local effects, he shares the general sense of the magnificence of the last shot and can only, rather lamely discount its force in the interests of constructing a consistent, positivist, development for Chabrol.

The problem of reconciling a just apprehension of the force which the central events and images exert in Chabrol's films with a positivism that is almost Lockean in its rigidity leads Mr. Wood into distorting *LE SCANDALE* and perhaps most unfortunately, into a dewy-eyed mysticism in his, at times positively illuminating and certainly very valuable, account of *LES BONNES FEMMES.* The weight of the evidence, consummatly marshalled and elucidated by the author, is surely against his final view:

> *"LES BONNES FEMMES* can be regarded as Chabrol's tribute to the unknown warrior in the persons of the girls, falling in the battle of life, forgotten but for his tender celebration of them."

Surely F.R. Leavis disposed of the critical habit which confused fictional identities with real life activities once and for all in his celebrated put-downs of A.C. Bradley. It's unlike Mr. Wood to forget the lessons of the master.

The central dificiency of the book lies, I think, in the nature of its generalisations, in the way that ideas of the nature of mature art formed anterior to the experience of the movies are permitted to inform generalised statements about Chabrol and the developments of his work that should more properly spring from the perceptive comprehension of the works in detail - a comprehension that the book rarely lacks and in which lies its real value.

There is, too, an absence of discussion of the "chute bourgeoise de l'oeuvre" detected by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, of the way in which fulfilment is to be sought exclusively in personal relationships and to be attainable only in those terms. From *LES BONNES FEMMES*, where the world Chabrol shows the girls to inhabit is rightly described as "radically perverted", we have moved to an arcadian Tremolat where economic activity, and thus modern life, hardly exists. Robin Wood and Michael Walker choose to talk of Chabrol assessing alternatives and they describe *LE BOUCHER* as, "one of the three or four supreme achievements of the French cinema since the beginning of the nouvelle vague". But surely any alternative rooted in Tremolat can be discounted from the beginning, it simply

has nothing to do with life as we know it. A self-supporting peasant community complete with class structure if ever viable, cannot now be regarded as a real alternative; to root one's sympathies and values in the Tremolat of *LE BOUCHER* is to choose a sentimental conservatism as a locus, and celebrate a retreat from the rigour of *LES BONNES FEMMES* to a pastoral ideal, (admittedly unachieved in *LE BOUCHER*), more usually associated with a lay poetess than the "elegiac poet" Robin Wood makes of Chabrol.

Richard COLLINS

SAM FULLER by Phil Hardy

Movie Paperback Studio Vista London 1970

Fuller is a gift to 'auteur' criticism, especially as it is conceived in England at the present time; his ideas and his personality reverberate with such force throughout his work that there is a temptation to find them more interesting than the movies themselves. But Fuller's subject, whether in *THE STEEL HELMET, RUN OF THE ARROW, FORTY GUNS* or *THE NAKED KISS* is, as Jacques Lourcelles has so precisely termed it, 'du sang et des catastrophes'. And a contrived rationale which purports to render a director like Fuller intellectually justifiable enough, on account of his ideas, for complex discussion will not suffice, because the American cinema is not simply a branch of 'American Studies'.

Now Phil Hardy's new book on the director is best when discussing the intricacies of Fuller's visual style; an example comes early on in the book when he is analysing the use of close-up in *I SHOT JESSE JAMES* and *FORTY GUNS*. Without appearing purely reductionist, he breaks a scene down into components and approaches excellent critical analysis of Fuller's emotive logic. But the stretches that attempt to justify the screen-time usurped by didactic conversation which only exemplifies Fuller's naive ideas on politics and education are not worth the intellectual convolutions employed. Fuller's movies are conceived in terms of situations, visual metaphors which defy logical reduction. Hence, we come closer to grasping the essence of Fuller's art when we are shown on the screen Sergeant Zack cradled in the arms of a Buddha, (*THE STEEL HELMET*), or a negro demonstrating against racial integration, (*SHOCK CORRIDOR*), than we do through any amount of discussion of the director's theories concerning Communism.

The emotive power behind such provocative use of imagery is, as Hardy defines it, the 'motor-force' of muck-raking journalism. However, Fuller's achievement must be qualified in respect of this; *VERBOTEN* is evidently inferior to *THE CRIMSON KIMONO, THE NAKED KISS* evidently inferior to *UNDERWORLD U.S.A.* and so on. The power of emotive rhetoric cannot compensate for the inability to conceptualise an idea in terms of the mise-en-scene. Fuller's mind clearly works only in terms of character and situation; "I'm not interested in who's a Red or an Anti-Commie. If I feel the hero should be a Fascist, I'll make him a Fascist. If he should be a Leftist, I'll make him one. I'm just interested in character." *FORTY GUNS* is of course the seminal movie here; for it shows how far Fuller can go in the pure fusion of metaphor and idea, with a disdainful contempt for the contingencies of narrative. In this respect, it defines Fuller's outrageous, 'apocalyptic' art.

Fuller's ideas, whatever significance they have, can only be meaningful if they are embodied in a cinematic metaphor on the screen. *UNDERWORLD U.S.A.* may well be his finest movie because of its near-perfect artistic articulation of the underlying idea, yet losing none of the efficacy of the 'motor-force'. Similarly, in *SHOCK CORRIDOR* and *THE NAKED KISS*, where the value of the images on the screen only serves to underline the naivety of the ideas that gave rise to them, we find ambition constricting invention. It is of no real consequence; that Fuller seems unable to translate his highest ambitions into coherent cinematic articulation, only confirms his limitations and highlights how fine *RUN OF THE ARROW* and *MERRILL'S MARAUDERS* are, how important their implications, stylistic and thematic.

Fuller came to England too soon and too quickly; too soon for us to have formulated any critical language with which to attempt concrete analysis, too quickly for us to have achieved any perspective on the relation of the individual to the totality. Fuller is primarily an emotive phenomenon; at this time, we might well ask, with Tavernier and Coursodon - "comment analyser l'emotion?"

Peter LLOYD

▼ Sam Fuller's project: SHARK! (1969)

The American Cinema

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(Editorial continued)

it comes from a respect for the extraordinary potential of the medium and from a concern for the cinema as an art-form - art understood not sociologically as a quality product accessible only to an educationally or otherwise privileged minority, but as an individually and socially significant and signifying human activity. Finally, it comes from a sense of gratitude towards all those film-makers and directors who have given us a glimpse or a concrete idea of that potential, to us both promise and challenge.

*

The present issue of MONOGRAM is intended to give a reasoned argument and an outlook to this general perspective. It contains three major articles on the American cinema which are meant to clarify some of the implicit assumptions which guided our work on the Brighton Film Review. The article "Why Hollywood" was initially given as a lecture at the National Film Theatre, the second half of which will be printed in our next issue. The reviews feature films which have been shown either in the cinemas or on tv during the past two months, and the article on Eisenstein's style make some pertinent suggestions about the possibilities of a narrative cinema based on fundamentally different aesthetic criteria from those present in the American cinema. The review of RIO LOBO is by one of the editors of Cinema, Mike Wallington, whose phenomenological approach is in some respects different from ours. We look forward to the time when Cinema will return as a publication to be counted on, so that such questions of methodology might be argued at greater length. Finally, the book reviews on Sam Fuller and Walsh raise issues about criteria of evaluation within the American cinema itself, which have so far not been given the kind of consideration they demand.

Besides reviews of current releases and individual films of the past, auteur-analyses, and features of a general nature, MONOGRAM will regularly include some detailed consideration of the expanding literature on the cinema, not only in the form of book-reviews but also articles on other film-magazines. In particular, we shall keep our readers informed about developments in film-criticism abroad, notably France, Italy and Germany, and draw attention to important issues of individual magazines. Our next number will be devoted to the European cinema, with articles on Bunuel, Skolimowski, Rohmer, Rivette, Bergman, Bertolucci and others, while our third issue is planned to deal with the British cinema.

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Catherine Deneuve in Luis Bunel's TRISTANA

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Like our image in a concave mirror, after seemingly receding into infinity, suddenly appears once more close before us, thus natural grace, when consciousness has traversed the infinite, returns to us. For it manifests itself in its purest form, either where there is no consciousness at all, or where consciousness is infinite, that is, in the puppet or the god. HEINRICH VON KLEIST

NARRATIVE CINEMA IN THE CONCAVE MIRROR by Thomas Elsaesser

REFLECTION & REALITY

What has marked off the modern narrative cinema in Europe during recent years is its degree of self-consciousness— about ways of constructing a cinematic fiction, about the manipulative effects produced in an audience, about the conditions under which images can give a true picture of reality. Fiction films have increasingly turned inward and upon themselves, in ever more tortuous coils, while the whole concept of the self-contained film has been challenged by the at least quantitatively very important number of film-makers who are resorting to a revival of ciné vérité methods and the deliberately artless filming of banal and random events. In a sense, history can be seen to repeat itself ("first as tragedy, then as farce"?): the modern cinema seems to go through all the agonies and uncertainties of European avant-gardism at the beginning of this century, and once again, it becomes difficult to distinguish the intellectually over-refined from the new barbarians.

On the whole, the influx of what one might call cinema theory into practical film-making, impossible to ignore in the work of Godard, Pasolini, Bertolucci, Straub or Rivette indicates a double mutation. It is first of all a tacit admission that the cinema has lost its primary social function of providing mass-entertainment and is looking for a new definition of its role and purpose. Film-makers are turning to the Russian directors of the twenties, in order to discover an alternative tradition. After the American cinema has become the god that failed, Eisenstein and Vertov are being proclaimed as the founding fathers of the modern cinema. Although it is too early yet to pass judgement on the productiveness of the new ideological-theoretical constellation, its impact is undeniable and points to the second aspect of the present crisis: the question of how the current generation of directors has reacted to their, in some instances systematically cultivated cinematic 'literacy', and how their aesthetic *partis pris* are conditioned by attitudes towards the classical narrative cinema—ranging from muted nostalgia to outright rejection.

The Long Shadow of a Tradition

With the intellectual grasp of the medium often preceding any practical experience of film-making, the new literacy in the modes of visual thinking has almost automatically relativized the stylistic means of the classical narrative form and introduced a shift in aesthetic priorities which is giving the director not only a different sense of what the cinema can or ought to do, but also a new image of himself in relation to his work. Partly in the wake of Godard's overwhelming impact on the sensibility of those under thirty attracted to the cinema, film-making in the last decade has unfortunately burdened itself with the entire paranoid ballast of the bourgeois artist in search of self-expression and working under adverse social and economic conditions. On the one side is the film-industry, monopolizing institutional cinema and supplying a shrinking market with products that receive less and less artistic attention, and on the other, there is the daily growing army of independent or amateur film-makers, impatient for a chance to realize their ambitions and ideas, but painfully handcuffed to this industry by the requirements of finance and distribution, and thus involved in an often devious protest-struggle, where an economic impasse is above all felt as artistic frustration, the whole problem being too often rationalized in narrowly aesthetic terms. The primary target of this aesthetic revolt is the narrative fiction film as a form, not least because it depends on comparatively complex skills and often vast resources having to be mobilized, and therefore requires the director to play along with the way the industry is organized.

Perhaps it is this basic insecurity about the cinema's position in the contemporary cultural context that has accentuated the trend towards a supercharged directorial individualism (Fellini, Visconti), and at the same time produced an uncompromisingly hermetic avant-garde.

There is much to be said for the current freedom from enforced cinematic conventions—if only that it allows one to look closer at what exactly it was one has been admiring in the past. On some film-makers also, the opportunity to explore the non-dramatic possibilities of the cinema is not wasted—I am thinking of films like Werner Herzog's extraordinary FATA MORGANA—and there are those who either by consciously utilizing what the dramatic form has to offer, or because their own development has naturally led them in this direction, have effectively transformed the narrative cinema from within and given it, so to speak, the contours of a properly conceptual effort, thus sketching a new role for the cinema as a form of thought.

It is a truism to say that even the most spontaneous and idiosyncratic director necessarily creates his films also out of a fund of received cinematic information. Yet there is a tradition in the European cinema, especially in France, where this received material plays an essential, even dialectical role: once in a while a director appears whose work implicitly incorporates (and at the same time conducts a dialogue with) a way of thinking about the cinema, an awareness of possibilities and limitations inherent in making films, that has to be responded to by a reference to film-history and film-aesthetics in order for it to become fully comprehensible. This crucial figure was, of course, Godard, and his work during the sixties remains the *degré zéro* of the modern cinema.

Far more radically than either neo-realism (as it is generally understood), "cinéma vérité" or the American underground, he broke the mould of the film as a unilinear, homogeneous naturalistic fiction and asserted its freedom to produce an autonomous form of artistic signification, rather than reproduce a conventionally fixed conception of reality. But this break did not occur out of the blue. It was the result of a prolonged and careful study of how these conventions had themselves been created by film-directors in the past—a study, that is, not undertaken by Godard alone, and on which the fertile aesthetic, literary and philosophical ideas of European intellectual history were brought to bear. Once the cinema was considered in this context, it became apparent that whatever the limits of the cinema-fiction established in the image of nineteenth-century realism and naturalist-symbolic drama, Griffith, Stroheim, Murnau and others had discovered and elaborated a dramatic-illusionist idiom infinitely adaptable to the expression of a very subtle moral and aesthetic sensibility. Godard and his friends, in short, realized the possibilities of personal statements through a conventionalized discourse, and they were confirmed in this by studying the flexible narrative diction of directors who had themselves summed up and reflected upon the cinema that preceded them: Dreyer, Renoir, Ophüls and Rossellini are the names which figure prominently—even where unacknowledged—in the consciousness and the subconscious of the modern narrative cinema, and so does Hollywood, in the way it was mediated and intellectualized by the European 'Americans', especially Hitchcock and Lang (the latter two decisive for film-makers such as Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer and Polanski).

Rather than being a stylistic influence, however, the œuvre of the directors mentioned has its relevance today because one finds there the basis on which to measure the aesthetic potential of the narrative-dramatic form, the range and complexity it has achieved so far, in the hands of great artists, and because films like ORDET, VIAGGIO IN ITALIA, LOLA MONTEZ, VERTIGO or LE CAROSSE D'OR carry with them their own critique of the medium, answering conclusively to the question of freedom and manipulation, realism and stylization, contingency and genre. Not least of all, these directors have demonstrated that they understood a crucial fact: there is a 'morality' of the cinema, as there is for all art, and that it requires the film-maker to take his own attitude to the material into the film, as the reflected presence of a vision.

It is with their work (and in each case, as with Godard, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) that the narrative cinema stands and falls—it cannot be judged or condemned by some generalized idea derived from a dissatisfaction with half a dozen impatiently sat-through super-productions. Film-history fortunately provides us with the concrete (though, alas, often inaccessible) examples **for** (as opposed to the best theoretical arguments against) a narrative cinema that is realistic (in the sense of suggesting a totality), thereby being no less poetic and conceptual (it can reason about and evaluate the world which it creates). The implicit challenge contained in this heritage has first to be met before any true claim to modernity can be staked. To refer to a tradition, in the context of Godard, Rivette, Bertolucci, Rohmer or Skoli-

mowski, is to acknowledge their modernity in this sense and to indicate the common focus of self-awareness with regard to the filmic means they choose to deploy. No one could argue that they are imitating pre-existing models. Among the directors of previous generations still working, only Bunuel and Bergman are giving proof of a similar awareness, of what it means to work through their expanding perception of the medium, rather than against it.

The 'Reel World'

One has to remind oneself of how implicit and yet pervasive the conceptual element is in the traditional narrative cinema, in order to see the irony involved in it now being consistently put down as naïvely unreflective. There is always a time when an artistic form reaches its maximum degree of efficient communication, so to speak, after which its subtlety is seen as byzantine, and it is being discared, even if the desire for change among those that follow often heavily outstrips performance. Thus, for instance, the reaction to the narrative cinema has taken three fairly distinct lines, formulated as an attack on its ideology, as a rejection of the discipline imposed by its formal demands, and lastly, it has suffered an invasion from other media—painters, sculptors and writers, denouncing its lack of abstraction, deploring its realism, and anxious to appropriate the cinema, cutting up the presumed corpse to satisfy the avid need for aesthetic experimentation. In other words, the cinema is rapidly becoming an ancillary art—a faithful reflection of its economic decline—and the scapegoat is the narrative form.

In this confusion, despair is only too understandable. What, one wonders, is the reality or truth that the cinema can render? And how was it that it became everything to everybody in such a short time? For if, a little over ten years ago, the self-consciously erudite directors of the *nouvelle vague* took as their main target (in France at least) the seemingly monolithic academicism of the film 'bien fait', which they battered for a time successfully with low budgets, hand-held camera work, improvised scripts and slogans about a new realism, the actual practice of the directors who had any staying power was far more deliberate than the cult of spontaneity led one to assume, and dictated principally by certain, quite advanced ideas about the nature of filmic reality in relation to actual experience. For after all, what they championed was the American film 'bien fait' in which they discovered a physical and emotional realism that they tried to emulate. The 'art' film with its top-heavy literary and pseudo-philosophical pretentions was almost as alien to Godard or Chabrol when they came to make films, as the cinema of Delannoy or Autant-Lara.

Today, especially left-wing film-makers, are again demanding greater cinematic veracity, not of content and feeling this time, but of form—as a precondition for changing the role of the cinema, and making it serve a dialectical vision. The way to achieve this, it has been suggested, is to reconcile the two historical poles of film-making: The documentary and the fiction film are to come together—Lumière and Meliès at last joining hands, as it were, by the grave of Hollywood. If one looks for examples, one finds them notably in France, though in what sense they could be said to supersede the classic dramatic pattern by a new dialectic is more than uncertain. However worthy their aim of producing a new kind of consciousness and making the cinema an instrument of knowledge, the result is (with rare exceptions) pure self-consciousness, unredeemed by the unquestionable seriousness and good intentions of their authors.

Whereas the documentary, in the form at least in which it has survived on television, endeavours to furnish factual information about the world outside, by surreptitiously structuring its material in such a way as to make a 'story', the new approach to feature films (*le direct* as it has come to be called) does its utmost to suppress or disguise the story that is the basis of its syntax, and to treat its 'fiction' (often starkly symbolic situations) as if it were a documentary, i.e. with a neutrality of emphasis, a distance, an absence of visual rhythm or narrative momentum which gives the images what one might call a deliberate aura of authentic artificiality.

Le direct, although undoubtedly occasioned in part by the sheer pressure of the American underground having in recent years surfaced and imparted its methods and ideals of unstructured fooling around with a camera to a wide-eyed, serious-minded European audience, has nonetheless a claim towards being a film-historical synthesis of sorts, because in the form in which it is practiced at present, it is accompanied by an intense critical activity. Such a conception and its deliberately primitivist use of the cinema (where it isn't merely the result of inexperience or lack of talent trying to 'get away with it') can only be explained—not as some optimistically assume, because films are finally lifting the various cinematic taboos from the real facts of life, and giving a long-overdue, new look at our society—but by the often very sophisticated and sometimes ignorant reaction to the cinematic tradition outlined earlier on—that of the fiction film working with dramatic models of conflict, climax, resolution, etc.

Where the theoretical apparatus advanced to justify *le direct* is impressive, it takes its inspiration from Brecht's dramaturgy, narrowly interpretated (if not wholly misunderstood) as a simple question of changing the relationship of the spectator to the images perceived on the screen by a concerted attack on all the forms of stimulating or sustaining the spectator's interest which are not overtly intellectual (particularly the 'psychological' attraction through curiosity, suspense, fascination, identification, or the conventionally 'aesthetic' ones of the spectacular, of grace or efficacy in movement and gesture, of physical plasticity and sensual presence). The implications, of course, challenge both the notion of 'style' and of '*mise-en-scène*.

This is not the place to go into the well-foundedness of the attack as such (cf. also the article on *Cinema and Politics* in this issue), but the central argument (namely that by having become almost exclusively a dramatic spectacle, the cinema has accepted a limitation of its potential functions which is now being questioned) deserves more serious and vigorous thought than it has hitherto been given. Nonetheless, it ought to be pointed out that *le direct*, far from being direct, is nothing if not devious, and given the fact that it is still caught in its origins of being a

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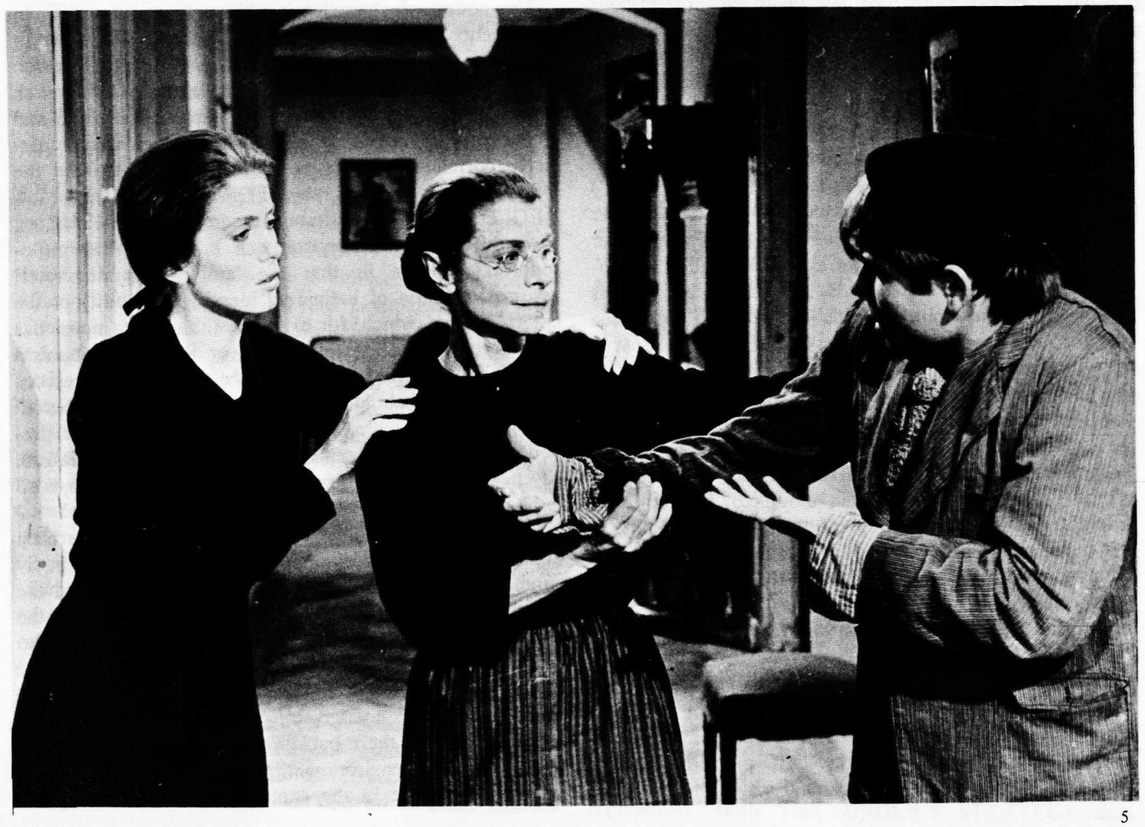


TRISTANA

reaction, represents at present an impoverishment of the cinema's proven ability to appeal to the intelligence **and** the senses, to develop an inner dialectic, which one might judge as dangerous to the art as the ideological sins of the dramatized narrative.

Eric Rohmer vs Pasolini

The definition of what constitutes filming *en direct* is, however, by no means clearly drawn, for it seems to comprise the meticulous compositions of a Rivette, the formalism of a Straub, the staginess of a Lajournade, the subjectivist improvisation of a Philippe Garrel, and even Bertolucci's THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY has been included.

In actual fact, however, the options open to a film have sharpened into a straight conflict between the dramatic-narrative directors and those who hold anti-naturalist, 'materialist' theories of film-making. In order to see how the division presents itself in aesthetic terms—leaving aside the more directly ideological argument—one has to turn to the debate which took place in the mid-sixties around certain pronouncements made by Pasolini. At the time, the most outspoken commitment for the 'classical tradition' and the idea that the narrative cinema was still a viable form, came from Eric Rohmer (cf. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 172 "L'ancien et le nouveau"). Though cautious in his assessment of the situation, his basic opinion was nevertheless fairly clear: he thought the demands for radically different modes of cinematic expression were likely to prove a diversionist manœuvre, opening doors that did not lead anywhere.

Rohmer in particular took issue with the now famous distinction which Pasolini drew between a cinema of poetry and one of prose. The somewhat emotively charged nature of the terms created a good deal of confusion, not least due to the idiosyncratic use of the semiologists' vocabulary in the reasoning. In Rohmer's view, the crux of the matter was whether the cinema is being used as an end in itself ("ceux qui prennent le cinéma comme objet") or as a means ("le cinéma comme moyen et le monde comme objet"), and that this has little to do with either poetry or prose. Here one might, nonetheless, add in Pasolini's favour that in the first case, the ultimate reality is the director's consciousness which he seeks to reproduce (the province of poetry), whereas in the latter case, it is the world, social and personal relationships which provide the referential basis (the aim of the realist novel). More decisively, however, Rohmer went on to point out that the question of how the cinema might express a new awareness, was not a problem of changing the grammar of the cinema (as Pasolini had assumed), but rather a difference of rhetoric (i.e. not of trying to manipulate a shot or a sequence as if it were an autonomous unit of meaning, but to control as precisely as possible the expressive-associative power of the images in their 'natural' sequence, through montage, framing and camera-movement). Furthermore, the opposition between absence and presence of the camera in Pasolini's argument seemed to Rohmer something of a red herring, for the fact that what is being filmed is given a spatio-temporal coherence by a camera that tries to efface itself, precludes neither a 'poetic' expression, nor a personal vision.

In contrast, Rohmer's own dichotomy was based on whether the characters function only within the system of reference established by the film itself, or whether they are interesting in their own right and have a life (potentially at least) independent of the director looking at them. He illustrated what he meant by a reference to Godard and Chabrol. "BANDE A PART is an extremely touching film, where Godard moves us: but it isn't the characters who move us, not at all. It's something else. The characters as such, the girl and the two men are only interesting in relation to their place within the film and the rapport which they have to the director. On the other hand, the characters of LES GODELUREAUX interest us, independently of the way in which the director expresses himself and defends his view of the cinema through them. And that hasn't anything to do with either film being less photogenic than the other".

Character and the Liberal Imagination

Rohmer's formulation of a film, continuing, as it were, outside the confines of the screen, restates, of course, the aesthetic position outlined by Bazin. But he also touches on a problem familiar from literature: a novelist who creates 'rounded' characters has a different view of the 'reality status' of the world that his novel depicts than he whose characters function primarily in relation to a central moral or philosophical dilemma, to which all the descriptive material and dramatic scenes are more or less directly tributary. This brings us to the 'modernist' argument, frequently voiced against the narrative tradition.

The notion of character is ultimately as interesting in the cinema as it is in the novel, especially in the way setting and protagonist can be attuned to each other. For example, it is easy to see that a classical director such as Ford or Renoir can create autonomous characters **and** a narrative structure, a dramatic context which perfectly correlates them (one thinks of how closely the different characters in, say, FORT APACHE or LA REGLE DU JEU necessitate and complement each other). Nevertheless, this conception can be queried on philosophical grounds, in that the 'autonomous character' assumes a notion of individual identity, a stability of the external world which, for example, the modern novel has been trying to dispose of: Ford's or Renoir's humanism might be described as one where 'essence precedes existence', i.e. their idea of character as consciousness-in-action is based on a subject-object distinction, on predefined boundaries of self and world, which existentialism, psychoanalysis and Marxism in their different ways all explain as a delusion.

In literature, the liberal concept of 'character' has been attacked since Flaubert and Henry James, to be finally submerged in the stream of consciousness novel and the *nouveau roman*. How did the cinema respond to the challenge? It was—as Rohmer clearly saw—Godard who most radically tried to use the anthropomorphism of the classical style against itself, by presenting in his films protagonists who are not 'given', or defined in their essence by and through their background and their (arbitrarily symbolic) visual environment, but whose identity (rather, whose significance in the context of the film) composes

itself as the film progresses from the often contradictory elements—verbal, pictorial, gestural—which the director (now overtly and often unnaturalistically) accumulates around them. Eddie Constantine quoting Eluard forces both Eluard and Lemmy Caution out of their discrete (cultural) identities, and shots of Anna Karina, Marina Vlady or Juliette Berto framed against a painting, packets of washing powder or posters and book-jackets function less as interpretative clues to their subjective states of mind at a given moment of the action, but as pictorial devices used often contrapuntally to establish meaningful associations **around** the protagonists, instead of presenting a psychologically coherent 'character'. One might say that the Picasso girl or the Renoir painting in PIERROT LE FOU 'look at' Marianne rather like we look at her—detached, ontologically at one remove, but 'interested'. Or one could interpret Godard's use of quotations, pictures, paintings, etc. as attempts to build up a mirror-reality, reflecting images and ideas which bring a social and cultural reality 'into' the film (the real world enters as reflected consciousness), whereas Sirk's or Ophüls' real mirrors reflect an inner reality (relating to the state of consciousness of the characters): within the realistic fiction consciousness projects itself as heightened vision, or dual vision—it is a function of active perception. Godard's free narrative method, on the other hand, enables him to portray a 'negative' essence and denote a passively receptive consciousness in, for example, the heroine of UNE FEMME MARIEE.

Godard's Sounds

The great temptation in this context (and one which Robbe-Grillet, Duras and other writers turned directors have not avoided) is to exploit the ease with which the conceptual coordinates of our sense of identity, namely the uniformity of time and space, can be played out against each other in the cinema. The abiding obsession of modern literature with the reality of consciousness deforming the real world led Resnais to portray a dislocation of consciousness by a juxtaposition of different experiences of time. MARIENBAD today looks very dated, almost archaic, partly I believe, because Resnais misconstrued the nature of the cinematic image: the cinema is a projection of vision, not one of consciousness. It is always in the present, active, and it can only give 'real' images, whereas the written or the spoken word can and does produce 'mental' images.

Different levels of consciousness in the classical cinema are therefore invariably located **within** the realistic image, as a function of space, signalled by shift and variations between the different spatial planes or the architectural structure—mirrors, doors, windows, partitions, etc. A favourite device of Antonioni's, at one time, was to let Monica Vitti's face cut into the frame from the side as a means of suggesting a dissociation of sensibility.

The effects achieved with such variations of foreground and background, or 'superimpositions' of several planes of vision are not unlimited, and Godard must in part be credited for having given a new direction to experiments in projecting complex states of consciousness simultaneously on the screen. His more recent method, taken from Dreyer and Bresson, on the other hand, exploits the different emotional and evocative intensity which is transmitted by words and by images (McLuhan's hot and cool), to establish a dialectical relationship between the association's emanating from the image and those from the spoken text (Eluard's poetry and Eddie Constantine again). But whereas Dreyer and particularly Bresson used the effect 'idealistically' to give (through the seriousness of the text) a spiritual quality, to a drab reality (e.g. DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST), Godard in his 'political' films (the case of Straub is more ambiguous) reverses the process by trying to 'debunk' the image in favour of the word. A neutral image is held in a static shot until it is drained of all significance, creating a vacuum into which the words—usually political speeches—are absorbed, as it were, giving them in the process a novel resonance and dimension. It is a psychological effect, halfway between surrealist collage, concrete art and the mesmerizing, autosuggestive atmosphere created by prolonged monotony. Its didactic, anti-dramatic function, to demonstrate 'false consciousness' has made it a ready recipe, and one of the privileged devices of *le direct*.

What kind of truth—what kind of fiction?

Godard's films have always had a natural buoyancy that lifted them towards abstraction, and they can almost all be seen as attempts to 'think' analytically and yet non-verbally the modalities of filmic meaning as a category apart, and in particular, to examine the process of transformation by which the cinematic image bestows a significance on objects, situations, human acts and gestures, sometimes quite removed from the connotations attached to them in everyday life—in short, the conditions under which a series of images can come to signify an idea, or communicate a feeling. This theoretical focus determined the themes, not the other way round, and the films were often cinematic speculations starting from romantic subjects—love, death, betrayal, and conducted in the iconic vocabulary of ad-mass and pop-art. Their attraction lies in the fact that Godard at once accepted the visual excrescences of modern society, and subverted them by utilizing them as a 'code'—always inadequate of course—to express a heavily romanticised individualist ideology.

What remains ambiguous about them is the kind of truth they expressed. Neither realistic fiction, nor documentary, nor subjective projection, their reference-point was, and remained, that aesthetic *persona*, the poetic self, bodying itself forth as "the raw realism of subjectivity". And since visual code and romantic emotion never coincides, the films agreeably oscillate between pathos and parody—catching exactly the mood of a radicalism without object characteristic of romantic irony.

With his 'political' films Godard has come to represent one extreme of the reaction to a narrative continuity based on psychological motivation and behaviourist realism. It would lead too far to go into them here, but their preoccupation with cinematic truth as a function of the overall structure rather than of detail is shared by other, less ideologically committed directors, who try to validate their fiction by compressing the realistic framework and paring it down, until a different structure of meaning —often, though not always, psychoanalytic—becomes transparent. Both THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY and

Rivette's L'AMOUR FOU have such a dual fiction, where one metaphoric system of reference is articulated by becoming the symbolic language of the other.

Similarly, DEEP END by Skolimowski develops within its narrative a visual symbolism which simultaneously extends the range of the plot and clarifies it. In the end, the symbolic structure appears as a kind of elaborate conceit, unfolding the story by a chain of metaphoric links (the metonymic ideas of water, snow, glass, diamond, steam, melting, all cluster round the basic image of the public bath, as the metaphor of adolescent sexuality), rather than by any strictly psychological development of the characters.

Skolimowski's method recalls the best films of Hitchcock, and the skill with which in DEEP END a 'poetic' discourse is woven into a dramatic-realistic one, shows some of the possibilities that the narrative cinema can explore when attempting to overcome the limitations of a purely psychological approach to character and situation.

Cinema in Huis Clos: Bergman

By contrast, Bergman has become more 'classical' as a director since the mid-sixties and PERSONA, with an increasingly conscious use of anthropomorphic symbolism. This needs a word of explanation: In the European cinema, the idea of a personal style has an obviously different connotation from that in the commercial cinema. As if to compensate for the absence of pre-defined genres, we find directors who—often over a period of decades—have managed to create an instantly recognizable cinematic universe (Bresson, Antonioni, Fellini) into which contemporary social reality enters only in a 'reflected' and at times obliquely 'coded' fashion. Each of these directors seems to be a law to himself, and there is a tendency to either like their films or dislike them, according to how sympathetic one feels towards the underlying general conception of life, rather than to react to the intrinsic artistic qualities of the films as such. More than any other, such a director invites a purely thematic exegesis.

The point to be considered is whether a cinematic vision which bears so obviously the marks of its creator in all its parts is simply self-referential, short-circuited in a tangle of private obsessions and fantasies (as in Fellini's case), or whether the idiosyncracies are the result of a self-imposed limitation, the price of a deliberate artistic discipline. This seems to be particularly true of Bergman. His consistency in theme, character and setting allows him to construct a certain world with exceptional lucidity and to examine a recurrent symbolic situation in depth—and that means in completely realistic detail. Bergman's recent films pose an interesting problem, that of the relationship between his visual language and the judgement he passes on his characters. The increasingly pessimistic, possibly sadistic portrayal of human frailty, of frustrated will to communicate, of remorseless perseverance in moral and psychic self-destruction is, one feels intimately connected with the peculiarly ascetic mise-en-scene, for Bergman's intensity and intellectual lucidity, as well as the calculated control of audience-response is largely due to a categorical refusal to let any reality (in the sense of unstructured contingency) enter into his films—an absence of 'real life', that is, which forms the thematic core of, for example A PASSION. Bergman here 'manipulates' reality so as to produce a symbolic situation, and his particular psychological realism is only effective as a metaphoric language (the predicament points to a larger situation: a society, or social class trapped in forms of behaviour which have become infinitely interpretable, and therefore unreal) because the field of vision has been so carefully delimited and closed.

For example, if one looks at the outbursts of violence in the film, one sees how precise is the relation of what the film says and how (at what price of exclusion) it says it: Max von Sydow swinging an axe at Liv Ullman transcends the level of hysterical histrionics because Bergman's restriction of the visual field, the avoidance of pans and long-shots cumulatively engenders a frustration, a sense of unnatural enclosure in the spectator which finds its lightning-conductor in Sydow's furious physical attack. Emotional intensity viscerally transmitted is one of the secrets of the American cinema's sheer physicality. Only Bergman among European directors manages a similar physical immediacy in his films, for he uses aesthetic processes specific to the cinema (the manipulation of space, e.g.) not to create intellectual effects, but to convey psycho-physiological states (here a sense of claustrophobia) that are integral part of his moral themes. The barrenness of his island is the richness of his cinema.

Bunuel's Tristana

Equally closed to the randomness of ordinary life are the films of Bunuel, though not by an artificially restrictive field of vision, or the atmospheric purity of the setting. Instead, intensity and concentration arise from the peculiarly foreshortened syntax of the scenes, the elliptical narrative (particularly in BELLE DE JOUR, LA VOIE LACTEE, TRISTANA) and the wholly subterranean momentum governing the motivation of the protagonists, which Bunuel never allows to surface. The effect is to cut away the outward trappings of psychological causality and thus suspend momentarily the distinction between the 'real' and the 'imaginary'. The action unfolds in an atmosphere of total ontological fluidity, while remaining squarely within a recognizably real world.

To have achieved this without resorting to subjectivist fantasy, to have avoided 'surrealism' and yet remained absolutely faithful to the surrealist aesthetic with a meticulous behavioural naturalism in gesture and circumstantial detail is the best proof of Bunuel's rare visual sense. In TRISTANA objects stand out in relief, without becoming thereby symbolic: they do not point to anything, they simply are. At the same time, the film communicates or 'signifies' primarily by its visual rhythm. Scenes, and sometimes individual shots are linked, not in view of their verisimilitude within the movement of the plot, but by an audaciously controlled **displacement** of overt logic and continuity, in favour of an inner dynamic. A transference of significance takes place, a force becomes visible beneath the images—whereby the narrative often proceeds by omitting the logically most expected shots, and puzzling the spectator into trying to find the *tertium comparationis*, so as to complete the chain: the real film takes place in the mind of the beholder.

It is a narrative method which ultimately goes back to UN CHIEN ANDALOU, only that in a film like TRISTANA the explicitly psychoanalytical symbols of Bunuel's first work have been abandoned in favour of an imagery integrated into the characters' realistic environment. Bunuel's development in recent years is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the modern cinema, for his realism acts more and more as a kind of decoy, which camouflages another reality altogether. TRISTANA as a film has the same kind of fascination as a conjurer's performance. One wants to go back to it, just to see 'how it is done'. As if guessing this curiosity, Bunuel throws out a few hints, for at the end he repeats (in chronologically inverse order) brief moments from the film, teasing the mind with the pivots on which the story's real logic might hinge.

In theory, it might look as if Bunuel's procedure was similar to that suggested by Pasolini's 'poetic' cinema, where sequences are also interlaced according to a non-naturalist dramatic logic. But the films show at once that this is not so. Bunuel works by visual understatement, Pasolini uses an aesthetic borrowed from allegorical painting, which in the cinema amounts to visual overstatement. One of the reasons why his films have such a tedious stasis comes from the manner in which he 'composes' his narrative: too many scenes which are—in terms of their symbolic significance—highpoints, dramatic *moments forts* are lumped together without transition, while the peculiar gift of Bunuel is that he tantalizingly allows the spectator only a *moment faible*, where the significance of the action would require a *moment fort*, thus creating a constant dialectic between signifier and signified at the heart of the action. Catherine Deneuve choosing between two identical peas (in TRISTANA) becomes a *moment fort* (whose significance we have to discover for ourselves), whereas Massimo Girotti running naked across a volcanic desert (in TEOREMA) is a syntactic *moment faible* because coming as the last of a series of climaxes sucessively cancelling each other out.

The astonishing receptiveness of highbrow audiences for aesthetic experiments of the kind carried out by Pasolini has something to disconcert. It proves the low intellectual and artistic demands made by the vast majority of the educated public on the cinema at present, which has fostered an atmosphere of misplaced generosity and indulgence. More optimistically, however, it also indicates perhaps an increased willingness to concede that the cinema might be an art with a future. To single out Pasolini as the *bête noire* of the modern cinema is not to cast doubt on the integrity of his artistic efforts nor to begrudge him his role in stimulating a theoretical debate, but because his theory together with his practice has become a source of crippling misconceptions and aesthetic confusion. The prominence given to his work has also meant that some of the most creative and accomplished film-makers in Germany, Italy and France—Werner Herzog, Marco Belloccio or Rivette, have not reached an audience that might appreciate their contribution to the modern cinema.

Superficially it looks as if there is a kind of hiatus in film-making today, with the so-called avant-garde giving the impression of being at least half a decade behind the best narrative cinema, in thematic range as well as subtlety of expression. Perhaps it is a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*, and it would certainly be wrong to mistake the new awareness of narrative mechanisms and the paradoxical discovery of their at once 'arbitrary' status as syntax, and yet decisive role in giving **meaning** to a film for a mere lapse into retrograde primitivism. Who could overlook to what extent the most gifted film-makers in Europe have enlarged the metaphoric range of the cinema and penetrated outmoded fictions with a new sense of freedom to express a differently structured vision of reality? The narrative cinema is not dead. If it needs to disappear into the mirror of reflection, it is in order to become more 'visible'.

LA VOIE LACTEE

JACQUES RIVETTE AND L'AMOUR FOU

PETER LLOYD

PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT

LOUIS MARCORELLES: "Didn't the cinema once reach a sort of state of grace, which it has lost today?"
JACQUES RIVETTE: "Yes . . . but since it is lost, it isn't worth talking about".

Sight and Sound Autumn 1963.

The career of Jacques Rivette has entailed the exorcism of those consequences of the cinema's 'fall from grace'. It has entailed the realisation of two films, whose merits reside less in their completed state than in their conceptual essence; they would hardly qualify their creator for everlasting glory. One, PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT (1959), suffers from an *angst* attributable to the atavistic power exerted on the young director by the cinema of ANGEL FACE and BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT, two films on which Rivette wrote reviews for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The other, LA RELIGIEUSE (1964), incorporated to a certain extent within its structure this atavism, canalising the outcome into artistic statement; its formal organization reduced the hysteria of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT to a sobriety generated by fatalism. If L'AMOUR FOU (1968) sets Rivette among the best directors anywhere, it is due to the completeness of this exorcism; as in MADE IN U.S.A. (1967) of Godard, that exemplary *film maudit*, the ghosts of Hitchcock, Lang and Preminger, which have haunted the New French Cinema for the last ten years, have finally been laid to rest by L'AMOUR FOU. The classical tradition has outlived its uses; but Rivette rejects that tradition, paradoxically, only because he has absorbed its principles, received with thanks all that it has had to offer.

I: 'Ce qui était passionnant, c'était de susciter une réalité qui se mettait à exister d'elle-même . . .'

It could be said of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT that Rivette misunderstood the themes that he propounded, negated his content by its formal design. What strikes one immediately is Rivette's relationship to Preminger, both thematically (the freedom/constriction inversion and its necessary acceptance of illusion), and stylistically (the objective observation of action). But, paradoxically, the relationship is demonstrated by its misuse. In the Preminger of BONJOUR TRISTESSE (1957), for example, tragedy is attained by a final acceptance of universal responsibility, and a galling sense of loss. Preminger's style allows his characters, within their limits, to forge their own destinies, accepting always the possibility of respect and its consequences, as well as allowing the spectator to make up his own mind about the action. But, in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, Rivette commits the error of Jean Seberg in the movie of Preminger; from a balcony, he observes his characters through binoculars, comforting himself with the belief that this is a necessary objectivity. Yet, Preminger is at one further remove, observing the act of observance, while Rivette is consumed by the illusory freedom of individual choice. With no one to observe him (except the impotent spectator), he pretends to offer us a reality in a universe where characters can forge their own patterns of thought and behaviour, while all that we in fact see is a schematization of this behaviour, a mockery, however well-intentioned, of Preminger's synthesis of ethics and aesthetics.

Rivette's mistake, ultimately, is his approach to formal technique; his avowed aim was a dialectical film, a "film-discussion", and hence a film without a linear narrative structure, whose core was a situation, thus reducing the autonomy of the director. But the dilemma of the characters is, in fact, to follow a certain linea path within the closed paradigm, when their situation should enable them to choose, to adopt certain patterns of behaviour as more justifiable than others, to gradually evolve a method of action whose goal is a veritable liberty (cf. LA CHINOISE).

PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT is a film dictated by mood, by a certain attitude struck by Rivette prior to the realisation; it is, thus, a schematic film, and precludes the possibility of a dialectic except on the most superficial of levels. Characters are forced into certain roles; the parallel between the situation of the movie and the rehearsals for *Pericles* forces us into a realisation of the allegorical roles of the film, the fact, for example, that Anne equals Marina, emblematic of innocence and constantly renewed hope. Gérard Gozlan is correct when he summarises the movie in a piece of dialogue between Philip and Terry towards the end; "where are we going?" "Oh, we'll see".[1] Instead of an attempt by Rivette to balance his dramaturgy, to present a coherence even on the most muted level, we suffer a tone of vacillation and frenzy that amounts to dramatic stasis, providing an unfortunately ironic contrast with the thematic parallels of *Pericles* and METROPOLIS. By a fear of formal manipulation, Rivette denied the possibility of the democratic cinema that he would have postulated as the antithesis to 'l'atmosphère de gaullisme, menaçant et triomphant',[2] the mood which, he admits, gave rise to the film itself.

Yet it seems as if the technique of the film contradicts Rivette's avowed intention of avoiding unnecessary 'faked' manipulation by the director. Consider for a moment some aspects of the symbolism of the movie; the little, childish drawings of fierce creatures that cover the walls of Philip's room, his 'demons'. In order to demonstrate the madness of the character, Rivette resorts to a technique endorsed by the classical narrative cinema, the decor as active agent in the method of 'characterization'. Elsewhere the mood dictates and therefore constricts symbolic potential; the accent on the opening and closing of doors, for example, the hesitancy of the characters which precedes this, the framing of them individually or in groups in rooms, corridors or telephone booths is emphasized to the extent of ritualism. The specifically spatial mise-en-scene of Rivette (the ordering of characters within the frame operating in a void, punctuated by certain accented segments of the decor, cf. the photographs of war and destruction, the demons of Philip, etc.), reinforces the gratuitous element in this ritual.

Nevertheless, to recognise the indiscriminate opening of doors is to recognise the first tentative effort on the part of Rivette to achieve the autonomy of the film itself, an autonomy of the trajectory, by the inherently aleatory nature of the structure. PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT instigates, in the work of the director, narrative as cul-de-sac, as the double-back; at least, it is plain that this was the intention. But it is paradoxically just the aleatory nature of the film which precludes the demonstration of narrative contingency, by impressing on the spectator the subordination of the contingent event to the total 'pattern'. Contingency here becomes the pawn of a definite obscurantism; the same fatalistic atmosphere dominates every situation, every character, every relationship. And thus the positive effect of contingency, the possibility of good, is negated.

So one is forced to watch this deterministic pattern unweave, and can gain no comfort from the ambiguous final image, or the script-level affirmation of the continued search for the mysterious guitar-music, artistic embodiment of a spurious salvation. By attempting to escape from the essentially spectacular (read dictatorial) nature of the formal cinema as practised by Hollywood, we are presented with a more insidious form of the spectacular, pure bad faith, an insult to the depiction of reality, to which any fiction has an obligation, that of justification and acceptance. In PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, the paranoia of the characters reflects, on another, more serious dimension (that of the morality of the mise-en-scene) on the method of Rivette himself.

II: 'Je crois de plus en plus que le rôle du cinéma, c'est d'etre complètement démythifiant, démobilisateur, pessimiste'.

The universe of Jacques Rivette is a violent universe; of murder, sex, sadism, madness and suicide. The diversion from the American Cinema in this respect is that Rivette makes the violence wholly consonant with a recognisably common reality, stripping away the romantic aura of the Hollywood genre. Nevertheless, similarities remain, and in

this way it is easy to recognise PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT as a French 'film noir', with its accent on the environment as psychological landscape. Nino Frank has written of the 'film noir'; 'C'est l'accumulation de ces plans realistes sur un thème bizarre qui crée une atmosphère de cauchemar'.[3] But Rivette has accumulated the bizarre by a complete reduction of linearity, by the abolition of the motive for action which distinguishes the Western or the gangster movie. The sole motive for acts of violence in the films of Rivette is the disturbed psychic condition, striking out gratuitously in its paranoic search for identity and a suitable way of life.

But, to create a moral element, the depiction of a violent, contingent world must be balanced by the depiction of the possibilities of freedom. My criticism of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT rests on the gratuitous nature of its obsessions, the self-conscious ellipse of its form, its total introversion, its negation of any life outside itself. In LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette synthesised his personal obsessions with a universal reference, this time by the mastery of the familiar Premingerian paradoxes of freedom and inhibition, by the reversal of norms and accepted symbolic presentation.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of LA RELIGIEUSE, especially in relation to the artistic evolution of Rivette; his complete grasp of the dramatic modes of the traditional American Cinema, its classical symbolic figuration of experience. The main element of the mise-en-scene in LA RELIGIEUSE is its utilization of dramatic space (an art that Rivette has undoubtedly derived from the movies of Lang); a consideration of this utilization will explain what I mean.

The opening scene sets out the tone of the movie; the deliverance of Suzanne Simonin to the convent at Longchamps. Shot in dark, austere colours, the scene suggests intense repression with its bar-like shadows. The stark bareness of the rooms and corridors of the various convents work excellently on the level of decor, both functional and symbolic of the void, the arid spiritual life. Yet one's response is inverted by Rivette in his direction of the scenes around the less repressed convent of St Eutrope d'Arpagon, run by the lesbian Mother Superior, Mme de Chelles. In one scene, Mme de Chelles sits with Suzanne on the edge of a well in the convent grounds, and embraces her, consoling her for her previous misfortunes. The environment, the fresh, natural garden, suggests a new freedom for Suzanne, but the two figures resting precipitously against the well, and the sensuality of the embrace unbalance this first reaction. In the tradition of Preminger, Rivette respects his narrative sufficiently not to disbalance it by the intrusion of the manipulator; he allows the spectator to react on whichever level he chooses.

For, as Suzanne is 'free' through her constant (and constantly aborted) search for individual expression, Mme de Chelles (and later, Père Lemoine) are constricted by their sexual demands, by their inability to achieve a liberty which, if not always expressed, is yet latent in Suzanne. We notice the four-poster bed in which Suzanne is sleeping when Mme de Chelles attempts to seduce her; the double movement of the characters in this scene (Suzanne getting out of bed as Mme de Chelles tries to slip in) expresses their individual natures in relation to their mutual situation, the metaphoric level of the scene juxtaposing the roles of the characters without disturbing the narrative in any way. Similar images define more sharply the circumstances of the 'imprisoned'; Mme de Chelles collapsed against the locked door of Suzanne's bedroom, with the long corridor stretched out behind her. Père Lemoine seen cramped behind the bars of the confessional.

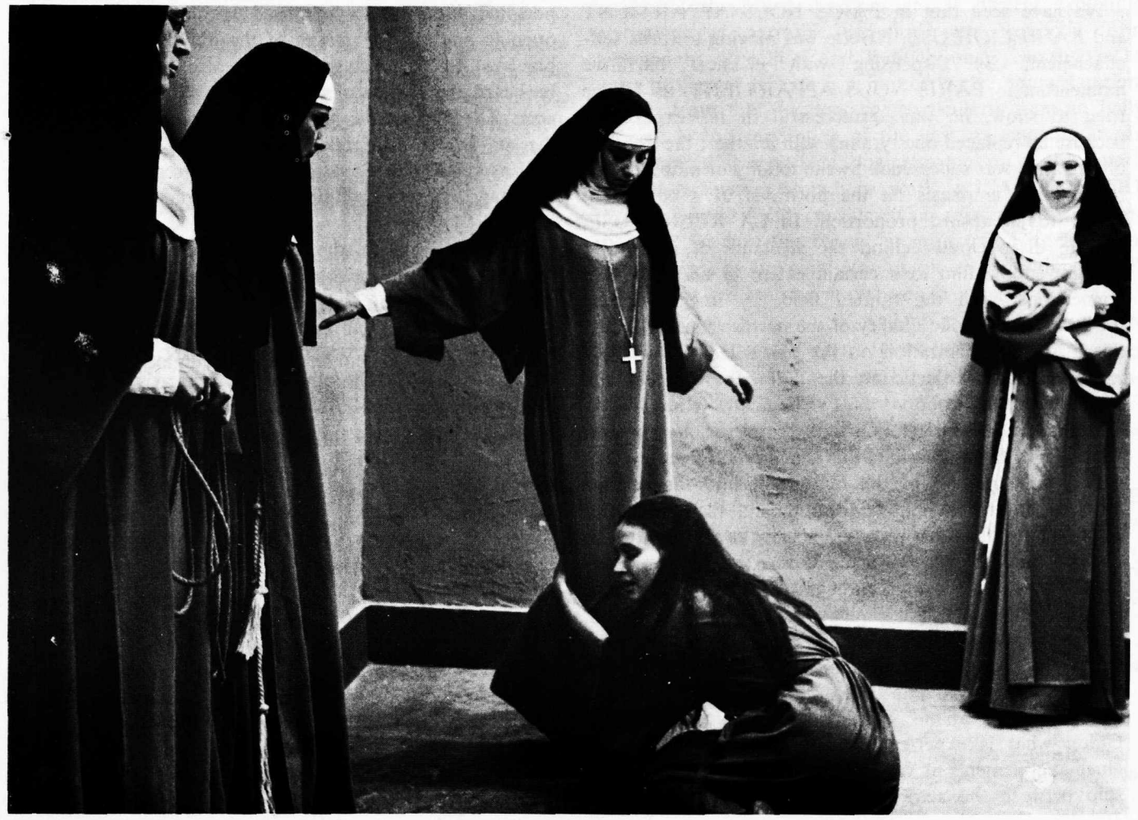
Such images as these contradict any simplified view of the characters or the situations presented in the film, and illustrate very clearly the aesthetic on which the mise-en-scene is founded. If, in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, the situations of the 'narrative' are intellectually conceived and hence elicit the uncomfortable response often felt when allegory poses as reality, the theme of LA RELIGIEUSE is forceful through its subordination to the gestures of the characters and the acts within the narrative situations. In the career of Rivette, LA RELIGIEUSE represents the classical response to mise-en-scene, and as such a development in the director's attempt to efface himself almost entirely behind his material. In an article on EVA, of Joseph Losey, Michel Mourlet makes a distinction between two antithetical conceptions of mise-en-scene; the one representing 'la dramaturgie naturelle en relief', where the attitude of the director to his film is conveyed through the inherently symbolic nature of his fiction, elevating the individual act and the particular situation onto a universal plane, the other representing 'la dramaturgie en creux' where, in Mourlet's words, 'par coquetterie intellectuelle, ce qui est inutile ou accessoire est souligné, les temps faibles cultivés, l'expression volontairement non signifiante'.[4] One might imagine this a commonplace aesthetic distinction, if the hostility towards the American Cinema was not so widespread as it apparently is.

It relates, of course, to the symbolic conception of the world as represented by Hollywood, which has been referred to as a 'syntagmatically created symbolism'; that is, incorporated within the linear structure of the movie, and arising from the symbolic potential of the material as visualised by the director. It is a limited symbolism, but not entirely static; consider, for example (one among many) the gradation of reds in ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS of Douglas Sirk. One's reaction to it, however, is that it creates an artificial tension in the relation of the fiction to everyday experience. The levels of meaning threaten to engulf that experience by the inherent formal structure imposing a facile artistic affirmation by complete exclusion of the contingent. Ultimately, such a symbolism can only exist within an inclusive structure which, although providing a formalization of the chaos of experience, borders on the unreal because of the excessively paradigmatic dimension.

Rivette's own opinion on LA RELIGIEUSE is brief; 'J'avais utilisé . . . les methodes traditionnelles de tournage, et je m'étais beaucoup ennuyé'.[5] The movie proved that he had learnt his lessons well, but the achievement is always as limited as the aesthetic is viable. Nevertheless, only PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT and LA RELIGIEUSE could have made possible L'AMOUR FOU.

III: 'Je crois de plus en plus qu'il n'y a pas d'auteur dans les films; qu'un film, c'est quelque chose qui préexiste. Ca n'est intéressant que si on a ce sentiment que le film préexiste et qu'on s'efforce d'aller vers lui, de le découvrir,

L'AMOUR FOU



LA RELIGIEUSE

en prenant des précautions pour ne pas trop l'abîmer, le déformer'.

L'AMOUR FOU is about the rehearsal for a play and the crack-up of a marriage. The central character, Sebastien, is rehearsing a production of *Andromaque*, by Racine, with his wife Claire playing the leading role. Near the beginning of rehearsals, she leaves the production, pleading claustrophobia at the presence of a television crew filming the proceedings and interviewing the artists; she is replaced by the ex-wife of Sebastien, Marta. As the rehearsals continue, Claire becomes progressively more paranoid; gratuitously, she sleeps with an ex-lover, while Sebastient is himself unfaithful with an actress from the theatre. Eventually, after a weekend during which Claire and Sebastien, locked in their apartment, engage in an orgy of sex and destruction, she boards a train and leaves him.

Essentially, L'AMOUR FOU commences from a situation; there is no pre-ordained plot, indeed the movie was shot from day to day, after discussions between director, technicians and players, with only one determined event in mind, the final departure of Claire. The revolutionary aspect of L'AMOUR FOU is evidently in the conception of narrative structure, and the dazzling paradox that it implies is that of a film in which there is a possibility of **the work itself contradicting its author.** This is made possible by the dynamics of the structure and the move towards effacement on the part of the director. The importance of the movie is its participation in these two areas, those of narrative and symbolism, and it is around these areas that the following discussion is centred.

We have seen that in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT and LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette was moving towards self-effacement. By dispensing with classical narrative momentum in PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT, as I have tried to show, he was unsuccessful in his experiment because he replaced one tyranny with another; the linearity of narrative was superseded by the totality of mood, which reduced the emphasis on the portrayal of a contingent reality to an absurd proportion. In LA RELIGIEUSE, Rivette disappeared behind the structure of the work; he allowed the film to a certain extent to make its own connections, with the limited field, by integrating the intrinsically symbolic quality of the narrative situation. By this austere concentration on the particular, he was able to formulate a dialectic on the nature of freedom and repression.

But in L'AMOUR FOU, the director has almost vanished, as far as possible; this is achieved by an enquiry, within the structure of the film itself, into the relation between naturalism and stylization, and their dialectical interplay. In their entirety, the scenes at the theatre are shot on 16mm blown up for the 35 screen, while the scenes of the personal life of Claire and Sebastien are shot in 35mm. While the 16mm sequences are intensely 'directed', with their blatant hand-held camera work and the grainy stock, the sequences on 35mm are almost totally static and unobtrusive. Rivette's idea was the achievement of a vertiginous 'en abime' effect (to use the expression of Gide); what is experienced is the relationship between cinematic elements at various levels. There is the relationship between the actors in L'AMOUR FOU and their roles in the film, between the characters and their roles in *Andromaque*, between the participants in the *Andromaque* rehearsals and the television crew, between the work of the TV crew and the 35mm sequences, and between Rivette and the audience, that is to say between Life and Cinema. Here we are presented with the consequences of cinematic 'objectivity' as exemplified, for example, in the work of directors like Lang and Preminger, extrapolated to its furthest degree. The structure of the film arises organically from the interplay between individual elements, but what is important here is the relatively minor part played by the director as choreographer of all aspects. With L'AMOUR FOU, Rivette comes full circle; from his critical work, whose centre is the apotheosis of the auteur, to his own direction whose core is self-effacement. Film and auteur are synthesized.

Inevitably, however, the effacement cannot be total, not even with cinéma-vérité, to which L'AMOUR FOU approximates in many respects (cf. the hand-held camera work of André Labarth's TV crew). In the cinema, as in the other arts, creative action implies morality, and every shot, every gesture, every element of montage is inexorably linked to a certain moral conception of the relationship between Art and Life. But the advance that Rivette has made is from a traditional conception of the relationship (the belief in the conditional autonomy of the art work) to a conception which creates structure by emphasising dissonance, which creates art by merging it, to a great extent, with the reality that it embodies.

In the primary idea of L'AMOUR FOU can be perceived a certain pliable internal structure, the parallel between art (*Andromaque*) and life (the Claire-Sebastien personal life) itself symbolised within the movie. The opening and closing images of the film are the same; the blank white canvas stage at the theatre, behind which can be heard the sounds of the players awaiting the performance. The stage is the metaphor for the basic structure of the movie, the void filled by movement and gesture, as well as relating to Sebastien's own conception of Racine, the stage as room within which characters define their being.

The parallel with the American Cinema once again presents itself, in the Hollywood conception of the art-reality relationship. The work of a director like Cukor is symptomatic here; his continued thematic preoccupation (cf. PHILADELPHIA STORY, A STAR IS BORN) with the life-spectacle dichotomy has its firm axis in an inverse movement. His films are paradigms where the two roles within each character aid dialectically in the continual process of self-definition. But it **is** a paradigmatic method, a formal manipulation, whose aesthetic is viable only when simultaneously applicable to experience; it is in constant danger of becoming constricting in its rigorous form. This is a dilemma of which Rivette was obviously quite aware; and L'AMOUR FOU is patently in revolt against such spurious formalization.

Thus, narrative is reduced to a skeleton; in an interview, Rivette referred to the construction of his movie as being hinged on certain 'pivots narratifs',[6] elements within the situation around which expanding situations are being constantly improvised. Paradoxically the flashback method does not hamper this emphasis on the contingent; it does not define the trajectory, serving only as a basis for the

enquiry into truth beginning from a fixed position in the present.

The basic form of these 'pivots narratifs' consists of situations which mirror in reality the fictional situations of Racine. The phrase of Breton which Rivette took as the title of his film is an obvious comment on the doomed passionate relationships which Racine presents to us; 'ne puis-je savoir si j'aime ou si je hais?'—Hermione's exasperated question reflects the condition of Claire and Sebastien in its merging of antithetical emotions, in the intricate patterns of alternate sex and violence experienced in the film. But Rivette has said of the narrative situations; 'le principe c'était laisser les choses venir d'elles-mêmes, sans jamais les forcer, d'être là comme témoin'.[7] Certain actions of the characters bear both an elliptical relation to the central situation and yet retain their force as a contingency in their departure from the rigorous subordination of events to a total schema. The scenes where Claire, on a whim, attempts to purchase a small puppy, similar to one seen on a record cover, is an example. As an expression of her frustrated maternal instincts, the action is of thematic relevance; a cause for the strain of the marriage is the absence of any children. But yet it bears no obvious schematic relevance to the narrative. Its equilibrium resides in an integration within huge contingent areas. As Rivette says, it bears witness to a character, rather than dictating a certain symbolic conception.

The narrative structure of L'AMOUR FOU is allied to Rivette's idea of the role of the actor, especially in comparison between the theatre and the cinema. For Rivette, the theatre is a mechanism repeated incessantly by the actor, while the cinema is constantly in search of 'la surprise savante du hasard' (as he wrote in a review of Preminger's ANGEL FACE). With the obvious emphasis on the gesture and movement of the actor, because of the absence of formalised discourse, and the consequent reliance on improvisation, this is important. It also reflects on the role of Sebastien in the film, his timidity in the face of contingency and his arrogance in the face of the security of order.

But the area which is fundamentally concerned with the disappearance of narrative order is the symbolic quality of the movie. As the cinematic syntax is created by dramatic progression, so the symbolism is simultaneously organic, blossoming out as the movie takes shape. For, if any pre-ordained form is non-existent, the symbolic quality of situations, events or gestures cannot be organised. And the appearance of contingency (assuming, naturally, a fringe symbolism of its own) further complicates the process; situations become symbolic by their very non-development, or, alternatively, by their progression. This is all an increased implication of the objective mode of the film; Rivette throws the emphasis onto the audience, they are free to perceive the very dynamics of the film's symbolic architecture. Thus, symbolic suggestion pervades the movie; in the same way as the psychology of character in Racine is only analysable through the language, the film of Rivette is only approachable through the **immanent** symbolic quality of the images. Examples abound in the film; the madness of Claire, resulting in her simultaneous embracing and rejection of reality, is demonstrated by her constant relapse into the foetal positions, as she crouches in corners of the apartment. This physical position will ultimately be adopted by Sebastien, as the madness of his wife is transferred to him; at the end of the movie he crouches on the floor, listening repeatedly to the hysterical tape-recordings made by Claire in her solitude, of speeches from Andromaque, traffic noises, the beating of her heart. Another extraordinary example comes just before Sebastien returns to the theatre after his orgy in the apartment. We have a close-up of his face watching Claire, then he moves out of frame, and the camera rests on a large hole in the wall made earlier with an axe. The movement, implying an irresponsibility, conveys the gaping rent in the marriage caused by their activity, but what is important is the ascetic attention that Rivette has devoted to the composition of each shot of the movie, to be able to impart such suggestion to a totally contingent, ordinary gesture.

A similar principle governs the decor of the movie. Predominantly, Rivette shows us characters isolated against blank space (the theatre, the Claire-Sebastien apartment), expression of the void that they attempt to fill in their personal relations, and an evident continuation of the 'labyrinths' of PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT. Again, the symbolic properties of the decor are always immanent rather than emphasised; consider, for example, the palm-tree tapestry in one corner of the apartment, with its connotations of a paradise beyond the reach of the protagonists.

The achievement of L'AMOUR FOU is in its reorganization of modes of narrative form; in this respect, it places Rivette alongside Godard, although it should perhaps be said that these two directors are at present exploiting variations of narrative technique and symbolic form grasped by Rossellini and Bunuel some years ago. The next project of Rivette is a film of twelve hours duration, which, I am told, he does not particularly want anybody to see; in the conception of the idea, at any rate, it can be regarded as a perfectly logical extension of the experimental techniques already at work in L'AMOUR FOU. When asked if he considered a revolutionary cinema possible, he gave this reply; "je crois qu'un cinéma révolutionnaire, ça ne peut être qu'un cinéma 'différentiel', un cinéma qui remette en question le reste du cinéma".[8]

Alongside such movies as MADE IN U.S.A. and DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE of Godard, L'AMOUR FOU represents precisely that cinema 'différentiel', the cinema that, by putting the medium itself in question, represents the truly progressive element in the art.

PETER LLOYD

FOOTNOTES

1. Gérard Gozlan: *Positif* 47, 1962 reprinted in *The New Wave* (ed. Peter Graham), Secker & Warburg 1968.
2. Interview with Rivette: *Positif* 104 April 1969.
3. Nino Frank: 'Dynamisme de la mort violent', *L'Ecran Français* 61, 28 August 1946.
4. *Présence du Cinéma* No. 20, March-April 1964.
5. *Positif* 104.
6. Interview with Rivette: *Jeune Cinéma* 36, February 1969.
7. Interview with Rivette: *Cahiers du Cinéma*, September 1968.
8. Ibid.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY

STRATEGIA DEL RAGNO (THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY). Italy 1970. **Dir** Bernardo Bertolucci. **Sc** B.B., Marilu Parolini, Edoardo de Gregoro from J.L.Borges' *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*. **Phot** Vittorio Storard, Franco di Giacomo (Eastmancolor, Technicolor). **Mus** Verdi's *Rigoletto*. **Cast** Giulio Brogi (Athos Magnani), Alida Valli (Draifa), Tino Scolti, Pippo Cempanini, Franco Giovanelli. **Production** R.A.I.-T.V. 110 min.

Bertolucci is preoccupied with doubleness. He creates a looking-glass world in which the complementary alterity of the worlds on either side of the glass is defined symmetrically as a mutual lack. To step through the looking-glass solves no problems since the completeness absent on one side is also absent on the other. For Bertolucci dialectic is not so much a given *a priori* as a mirage that beckons invitingly on the horizon. His cinema strains as vainly as ONE PLUS ONE to cause electricity to flow across the spark gap, to force together gear wheels which remain obstinately far apart. The looking-glass, for Bertolucci, has all the blinding, flashing fascination of Medusa's mirror. He is therefore interested in Borges, whose 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero' inspired THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY, but Borges' interest in curious affinities across time and space, in the silent opening and closing of cosmic circuits is replaced rather by a lack of congruity, echo becomes a blankness. Similarly, although Bertolucci has Freudianised the story, by providing Athos Magnani, the supposed hero and actual traitor of Tara, with a mistress, Draifa, with whom the son also becomes involved, the implications of THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY are decidedly anti-Freudian. The return to Tara, the attempt to explore the past on the part of Athos Magnani, the son, does not so much release him from an obsession as supply him with one. Freedom and identity are not linked but cancel one another out.

The idea of the picture as a return into 'the realm of pre-conscious memory' is strongly reinforced by the mise-en-scene - the slow pans, the static, aesthetically framed compositions of Athos walking the narrow streets of the old town. the way in which the son constantly hovers on the fringes of the image, like an intruder into a world in which he has no place. Draifa's villa with its copious, overhanging green foliage itself symbolises the density and obscurity of the past, of sexual desire, of unconscious motivations. When Athos first sees Draifa she is separated and distanced from him, as in a dream, by an archway through which he has to pass to greet her. As if to suggest the dangers of a descent into the world of memory she tells him not to be afraid before they pass through the blackened doorway into the house. Bertolucci emphasises that the decision to do this is voluntary, both in the fact that Athos stays despite his own insistence, and that of Draifa, to leave; in the composition of the shot in which Athos, on an old bicycle passes at right angles directly under a modern freeway across which cars are speeding from right to left. But the 'pastoral' he encounters is filled with menance: the tall crops of maize on either side, the loud mooing of a cow heard on the soundtrack, the peasants who force him back under the bridge again. The past rejects the present, just as the present recoils from the past.

The parallel between father and son, established by having Guilio Brogi play both parts and by the use of intercut flashbacks, may seem unnecessarily laboured, but it is more suggestive than it appears. For the threat which the father poses to the son is not so much that of a dominating Oedipal figure and sexual rival, as of a model, a pattern, a deeply internalised ideal. Everything about Bertolucci's presentation of the father, in particular the identification through the romantic red scarf and British military jacket, suggests that he is an idealised projection of the son, a dream of what he himself would like to be. In his return to Tara the son can only repeat, in the form of farce, Athos Magnani's grandiose exploits: enter into a relationship with Draifa, mirror his fascination with the heroic, be conspired against by the same conspirators. He is doomed to repetition. The absent father broods over his own life, ensnaring him in the same mythological web which he has cast over the whole town. (The shot in which he stands silhouetted against the roof tops.) In finding out his father he finds out himself. Draifa, in fact, takes the son for the father. The relationship between the two is expressed in the concise but complex image in which the father gazes in terror through the barred window at the streets where a lion which has escaped from the circus is apparently roaming, while Draifa, her back turned to him talks about him to the son, who is situated beyond the frame - on the other side of the looking-glass. Thus the father is essentially a double and as always the shock in meeting a double is to discover in his features one's own face. Draifa, in describing one, with a timeless, sphinx-like knowledge, is also talking about the other. The name 'Athos Magnani' has 'the meaning or sound of rebellion or courage' but the name only designates a myth.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY is not an explicitly political film, but, insofar as it deals with Italy's Fascist past, a past with which, presumably, it is necessary to come to terms, it is a film with political implications. If Athos Magnani can be taken as a representative of Italy in the thirties then Bertolucci seems to be suggesting that perhaps there was all too little resistance to Fascism and that the cause of anti-Fascism was little more than a heroic but necessary legend. 'We were anti-Fascists and perhaps we didn't even know what it meant' says one of the conspirators, 'we fancied conspiracies, the Ernani .... but we understood nothing, absolutely nothing.' They are characters whose desire outruns their performance. Perhaps their sexual boasts - 'I'm 75 and I've got a girl friend who's pregnant' - are all of a piece with the vague and rhetorical ambitions of the song - 'we'll raise the barricades of real freedom'. There is a strange mixture of optimism and defeatism. On the one hand there is the vacant complacency of the conspirators as they sit on a log and murmur 'Fascism is by now embedded in the people', on the other their naïve, heavily gesticulated, enthusiasm as they plot the assassination of the Duce - who, as it happens, never comes to Tara at all. Athos Magnani's detachment from this suggests that, despite his romantic exterior, he is nevertheless a realist; perhaps more intelligent than the others he is careful not to confuse gestures with hard facts. So appearances, in life and death, become all. The question, for Bertolucci and for Athos Magnani the son, is whether this political impotence of the older generation is a ground for satisfaction or concern.

In his mise-en-scene Bertolucci's overriding concern is to build up a primitive, heroic, naïve, brutalised mythicised

world. The blank, silent, empty streets of the town recall Chirico, the ominous greenery of the countryside the work of Max Ernst. The animal paintings of Ligabue which appear over the credits show aggressors and predators - lions, tigers, snakes, fighting cocks. As I understand it, Bertolucci is linking Fascism with non-rational, intuitive, instinctive modes of feeling and connecting it with the peasant/folk culture which gave birth to it. There is a great emphasis in the movie on traditional crafts, songs, customs; on smells, eating, music, violence. Thus both Fascism and anti-Fascism are seen as degraded transpositions and extensions of the mythological imperatives of a decaying folk culture. Under the gaze of history unities come to the surface and conflicts disappear. The 'maledizione' (curse) of Italy is seen as being essentially cultural. Tara symbolises a culture which has died, which can neither be forgotten nor disposed of, yet which has nothing to teach because it itself never had anything to learn, but only went on trying to recall old memories.

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY depicts a personal and cultural identity crisis, in which the return to the past in search of wisdom and enlightenment is seen as analogous to looking for the Tables of the Law in a pile of broken rubble. It is a property master's wardrobe, offering endless costumes, masquerades, roles, never the truth. For Bertolucci Tara is what Europe was for Dostoevsky, a graveyard ..... but what if a graveyard is your only starting point?

THE SPIDER'S STRATEGY is, on every level, a very accomplished film, which clearly establishes Bertolucci in the front rank of European directors. Nevertheless it does leave one with a small, but nagging sense of dissatisfaction, whose source is somewhat difficult to pinpoint but which, in the final analysis, resolves itself into our familiar criticism of the European cinema: that the mise-en-scene serves primarily to block in a conception that has already been drawn in outline, while the director in the American cinema is much more akin to a painter of the New York school, who creates directly onto the canvas and whose awareness of what he can do is more closely related to his practical experience and his knowledge of the potentialities of the medium. The point can be made another way by noting that when Bertolucci crystallises the significance of the picture in particular images, these tend to relate directly to the totality and not to be fully and expressively embodied in a particular context. This could be validated by invoking, though in a rather different way, Pasolini's distinction between cinematic prose and cinematic poetry. It could be argued that the American cinema with its narrative emphasis and orientation toward the immediate context is a cinema of prose, the European cinema, with its freer construction and orientation toward the totality, one of poetry. Hence, at the very least, the American and European traditions simply represent alternative paths, both, in their own way, equally valid. But this would be altogether too facile for in the most fully achieved art of any kind there is no antithesis: the resonance which a local moment carries is precisely a function of its strategic placing. But against the holistic critic, with his solemn litany of 'form', 'organisation', 'structure', 'totality', 'balance', one is tempted to press the argument still further to insist, against, say, Schucking, who criticised Shakespeare for the sin of episodic intensification, that it is precisely in the expanded significance of a particular local moment, in its apparently gratuitous complexity, in its ability, whether in Shakespeare or Hitchcock, to bear, without fudging or strain the full significating weight of the entire work. Further, that it is precisely this cinema which is poetic.

A continuing danger in contemporary film criticism is the preoccupation of concocting simplistic recipes for artistic creation. The idea that lateral camera movements provided direct access to reality is supplanted by the equally futile notion that montage and 'le direct' constitute the A-Z of a revolutionary cinema. Bertolucci is a director who, in his formative period, has been exposed to seductive and potentially damaging influences, but who has nevertheless managed to find his own way. Ultimately, one feels, the interest of what he has to say will be fully reflected in his way of saying it. Bertolucci is a director in whom one continues to have the utmost confidence.

DAVID MORSE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ATTI DEGLI APOSTOLI (ACTS OF THE APOSTLES). Italy 1968. **Dir** Roberto Rossellini. **Adapt** Vittorio Bonicelli, D. de la Rochefoucault, R.R. Luciano Scatta. **Phot** Mario Fiorelti. **Mus** Mario Nascimbene. **Cast** Eduardo Torricella (Paulus), Jacques Dumur (Peter), Mohamed Kovka (John), Bradai Ridha (James the elder), Zoviten (James the younger), Zignan Honune (Stephen). **Production** RAI/ORTF/TVE/Studio Hamburg.

Due to visions only of the truncated version of ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (two out of the five episodes, under the general title 'From Jerusalem to Damascus'), the first problem arises with a consideration of Rossellini's intrinsic attitude towards his material. The extraordinary equilibrium demonstrated by the work is one created by the dichotomy between separate but related necessities, on the one hand, a fastidiously 'scientific' epochal reconstruction, and on the other, the need to transform the specifically historic onto a universal ontological plane. These 'historic figures' (Peter, Paul), placed before us, are metamorphosed into 'models of action' through a moral aspect.

Yet, despite its subject, the movie of Rossellini is humanist rather than Christian in its conception, although his mise-en-scene testifies to the acceptance of the presence of a higher spiritual reality. This is demonstrated in the sequence when Ariostarchus, the slave, points out to the newly appointed Roman governor the place where Christ collapsed under the weight of the cross. As they talk, the camera cranes up unobtrusively and delicately to set the characters in the spiritual context, isolating them in deference to their environment. Similarly, Rossellini is careful to demonstrate the sanctity of Golgotha itself; as the two characters approach the hill, the camera situates them in long-shot to one side of the frame, with the environment again dominant.

However, Rossellini seems more concerned with the validity of the apostolic action qua human action. He is concerned with the dignity of the behaviour of the apostles as human beings, rather than as disciples of Christ, although the one function evidently relates to the other. An example of this

ERMANNO OLMI: a filmography

1953–1961: about forty documentaries, including:
LA DIGA DE GHIACCIAIO (1954)
MANNON: FINESTRA DUE (1956)

1959 *IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO* (TIME STOOD STILL). Italy. 80 min. **Prod** Edisonvolta S.p.A. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Carlo Bellero. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Pier Emilio Bassi. **Cast** Natale Rossi, Roberto Seveso, Paolo Quadrubbi.

1961 *IL POSTO* (THE JOB). Italy. 105 min. **Prod** Titanus, **Scr** Olmi, **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Cast** Loredana Detto (Antonietta), Sandro Panzeri (Domenico).

1963 *I FIDANZATI* (THE FIANCES). Italy. 75 min. **Prod** Titanus Sicilia/22 Dicembre. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Gianni Ferrio. **Cast** Carlo Cabrini (Giovanni), Anna Canzi (Liliana).

1965 *E VENNE UN UOMO* (A MAN CALLED JOHN). Italy. 90 min. **Prod** Vincenzo Labella. **Scr** Olmi and Labella. **Phot** Piero Portalup. **Ed** Carlo Colombo. **Mus** Franco Potenza. **Cast** Rod Steiger (Pope John). Adolpho Celi (the Bishop). Pietro Gelmi.

1968 *UN CERTO GIORNO* (ONE FINE DAY). Italy. 102 min. **Prod** Cinema-Italnoleggio Cinematografico-Istituto Luce. **Scr** Olmi. **Phot** Lamberto Caimi. **Ed** Olmi. **Mus** Gino Peguri. **Cast** Brunetto Del Vita (Bruno), Lidia Fuortes (girl interviewer), Vitaliano Damioli (Davioli), Raffael Modugno (the artist), Giovanna Ceresa (Account Executive), Mario Crosignani (Elena).

1969 *I RECUPERANTI* (THE SCAVENGERS). Italy. 104 min. **Prod** R.A.I.-T.V./Palumbo Productions. **Scr** Olmi, M.R. Stern, Tullio Kezich. **Phot** Olmi. **Ed** Olmi. **Mus** Gianni Ferrio. **Cast** Andreino Carli, Antonio Lunardi, Alessandra Micheletto.

comes with the parallel between the rectangular enclosure of the 'commune' and the similar enclosure of the sacrificial altar of the Sanhedrin. Mostly, Rossellini's camera is at ground level during the scenes in the commune; if the community-life is shown from a high-angle or through long-shot, it is because a sense of the totality, the inclusiveness of this life necessitates it. Characters within the frame move from group to group, are united by the long takes of Rossellini, the smooth panning around the courtyard; there is an impression of flux, of a certain communal rhythm, which is extraneous (although not necessarily so) to religious connotations. Rossellini gives us images in close-up of the simple labour of the community, the baking of bread, the weaving of mats. Indeed, throughout the film, the Christian life has been identified with the simplicity of peasant work; one notes the beginning of the movie, where the conversation between the governor and the slave is encapsulated by Rossellini in images such as the potter at work in the small house, or the locksmith in his alley-booth, on which the camera lingers after the principal characters have exited from the frame. However, the sacrificial square of the Sanhedrin is viewed almost entirely from a high-angle shot; the aim is not to present the inclusiveness of a life equivalent to that of the commune but to insinuate a moral context through a suggested comparison. The court-yard is, in fact, shown through slow-pans following the actions of characters; the emphasis is on a grim ritualism, a meaningless blood-letting, at the centre of which is the constant flame of the huge sacrificial altar, with the blood running to its centre. Against the imagery of water (cf. the Pentecostal baptisms, the washing of feet before meals) is posited the fire of the Sanhedrin, as a prefigurement of the gratuitous violence of Stephen's martyrdom.

This symbolic antithesis is, in fact, another aspect of the essential dualism at the centre of Rossellini's method in this film, a dualism arising from the inherently humanist ethic which informs it. It is important to emphasise, however, that, despite the didactic historico-moral foundation of ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, this is not a schematic dualism; as ever, Rossellini's vision manifests itself in the unity of the individual image. His film accords well with Panofsky's concise definition of humanism (in The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline), for what it presents is both 'the insistence on human values' but also 'the acceptance of human limitation'. And this presentation, continually implying the *context* of the action, is achieved by a very stringent mise-en-scene, consisting almost entirely of the zoom-shot; this camera-movement continually elevates the discourse from an individual plane to a contextual one, by relating character to situation, action to environment.

One recalls the 'context' shots of early Rossellini; in GERMANY YEAR ZERO (1947), for example, where rapid tracking-shots were followed by a sharp lateral movement, situating the character, indicating environment and purpose. In that movie, this technique was subjected to a rigorous gradation; from the boy's journey to his family's dwelling, or the schoolmaster's flat, to the bomb-shelter of the young girl, and that final image of the ruined street up which he walks while bells peal overhead, before committing suicide. In ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, these shots re-appear (cf. the appearance of the apostles in the streets of Jerusalem at Pentecost) and retain a validity for Rossellini; it is important to note, for example, that Paul is never seen in such a context (that is, with a specific direction) until *after* his conversion, when he is seen entering Damascus.

But mostly it is the function of the zoom to suggest contexts and to supply the connections between the human actions of the apostles and an abstract 'religious' tone. The first important use of the camera-movement is purely contextual: the Governor and Ariostarchus in the temple at Jerusalem. Rossellini zooms in for the conversation and then out once more. But the scene in the commune when Mathew is chosen as the apostolic successor to Judas imparts a symbolic level to the functionalism of the movement; after he has been chosen, and the disciples kneel to pray, Rossellini slowly zooms out, enlarging the sphere of vision as the physical reality fuses with a higher, spiritual reality. This is the stylistic key to the movie, by means of which the aesthetic is capable of sustaining an abstract, almost allegorical burden. On two occasions during which Peter is the central figure (his speeches at Pentecost and in the temple after the healing of the beggar), we find again this zoom movement, 'out' as expression of the supernatural, placing the merely human in a perspective, 'in' as expression of the mortal and the immediate. This inverse movement represents a dialectical style, exemplifying alternately action and limitation, but fusing them through the quality of the image, concentrating on the human action, but unifying it through the abstract expression of belief. An example comes in the sequence when Peter, John and Stephen preach in the temple, in defiance of the Sanhedrin. The structure of the sequence is composed of a zoom-out and a zoom-in, repeated three times (for each disciple as he preaches), connected by two zip-pans. It is precisely the formal stylistic repetition which reveals continuity in the individual action.

The summation of Rossellini's movie is the image of Stephen's corpse hanging upside-down from a tree; with the zoom-out, we see the connection between human heroism and religious martyrdom, the tragedy (achievement and cost) of the Christian movement, a protest against universal brutality, the synthesis of human and superhuman, the growth of the tree and the death of the martyr. ACTS OF THE APOSTLES ends with the restoration of Paul's sight and his joyful cry - 'I can see', thus beginning and ending with an affirmation of lucidity which is the fruit of Rossellini's deceptively simple aesthetic.

PETER LLOYD

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER

DER AMERIKANISCHE SOLDAT (THE AMERICAN SOLDIER). W-Germany 1970. **Dir** Rainer Werner Fassbinder. **Sc** R.W.F. **Phot** Dietrich Lohmann. **Mus** Peer Raben. **Ed** Thea Eymesz. **Cast** Karl Scheid (Ricky), Elga Sorbas (Rosa), Jan George (Jan), Hark Bohm (Doc), Ingrid Caven (singer), Margareta von Trotta (maid). **Production** Antiteater Munich. 80 min.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder — actor, playwright, theatrical producer and film director into the bargain — has not shrunk from exposing his divers talents to the public eye, and as far as the cinema is concerned, he has established himself at an unusually early age as the most prominent personality on the contemporary German scene. He has established not only a name but also, thanks to his popularity, a financial independence which allows him and his colleagues in the Munich 'antiteater' to keep producing new films with the prolific rapidity of a Godard. One of his most recent works, served up at the Mannheim festival last October, is THE AMERICAN SOLDIER, the latest in a series of films which reveal his fascination with the American cinema and its traditional genres. Although this fascination has provoked head-shaking censure from some quarters, THE AMERICAN SOLDIER indicates that it is controlled rather than indulgent, and that behind the quotation and the pastiche there is a degree of cinematic awareness and directorial authority that suggests Fassbinder's is not an over-blown reputation.

THE AMERICAN SOLDIER is in outline a simple tale. Richard Murphy, a first generation American and veteran of Vietnam, returns to the West German city (Munich) of his boyhood, as a hired killer with an assignment to carry out a number of underworld assassinations. He visits the scenes of his early youth, looks up a boyhood friend (played by Fassbinder himself), goes to see his mother and younger brother - and completes his assignment, efficiently liquidating a homosexual gypsy, a girl who pushes drugs in a night-club, and the mistress of one of the men who hired him. The latter, satisfied with his services, prepare to dispatch him in his turn: when he goes, as ordered, to collect his earnings from a left-luggage locker at the station, he falls into their trap and is finally himself gunned down.

The plot has its fair share of violence, but not only is violence laconically played down, rather than played up for sensation by Fassbinder's direction, it is curiously at odds with the mood of gentle nostalgia which is the film's most striking general characteristic. With its unhurried pace and lingering shots of a quiet, almost unpeopled urban world, with its wistful score and elegaic theme-song ('So much tenderness'), THE AMERICAN SOLDIER seems more attuned in mood to the theme of childhood revisited than to a series of cold-blooded killings. In fact, the nostalgia is not primarily generated by the theme of Murphy's journey into his personal past, for this theme is subsumed in the wider issue of Fassbinder's explicit confrontation with the *cinematic* past. His film is something like an act of nostalgic homage to the American gangster movie of the 30s, 40s and 50s, but an act of homage which is at once critical, self-critical and historically conscious. The idiom of the genre is lovingly re-created, but not simply for the purposes of admiring pastiche: in transposing it into Europe and the present, Fassbinder shows how the values which the genre once so confidently endorsed, can no longer be sustained; how, in fact, the traditional gangster film is a thing of the past, and how his own attempt at loving re-creation is, in one sense, little more than cinematic necrophilia.

The opening scene catches the idiom with almost quotational precision. A darkened room, a ticking clock, and a low lamp casting a pool of light on a table where, amidst the littered evidence of heavy drinking, three men in shirt sleeves and shoulder-holsters are playing poker with tense and taciturn deliberation. They are familiar types: the rabbity, bespectacled intellectual (even referred to as 'Doc'), the fat, perspiring heavy who stakes high and loses, and the tight-lipped, hard-faced commanding figure who remains cool and wins. The pace is slow and the atmosphere of nervous expectation acute, until the shrill ringing of a telephone. The authoritative figure takes the call in silence, replaces the receiver and announces curtly, 'He is here.' Music strikes up with a flourish, and cut to the night-time streets of the city - after the prologue, enter the hero, triumphantly, almost with trumpet and drum; white-suited, broad-brimmed hat thrust back, one hand on the wheel of a large American car, the other clutching a whisky bottle, as he drives down the approach roads to Munich with a blonde on the front seat beside him.

The expectations raised by this opening are, however, left subtly unfulfilled. Resemblance to the American gangster film proves to be only skin-deep, for something is missing, some quality of innocence has been lost. Where, in the American genre, violence, brutality and contempt for human life were always embraced, and to some extent redeemed, by a moral framework that asserted the value of life and affirmed certain liberal, humanist ideals, Fassbinder's world is one bereft of moral norms, one where violence is casual, arbitrary and irredeemable. The border between legality and illegality, between the force of law and the power of crime, has ceased to exist, and his characters move through the bleak landscape of a moral no-man's land. The poker-playing underworld figures who hire Murphy to kill, turn out to be at the same time detectives in the local police force. His death at their hands is thus as arbitrary and meaningless as those of his victims: the killer is killed, but his end yields no moral significance. It is not the triumph of justice, honesty and truth; a victory for neither law nor crime, it characterizes a world where the two have become indistinguishable. The hero, too, fails to live up to his triumphal entry. He has all the sartorial and physical trappings of the Chicago mobster, but again something is missing. The vitality is gone, that dynamic drive, positive in itself but simply corrupted to base ends, that makes the hero-villains of films like Walsh's WHITE HEAT and THE ROARING TWENTIES sympathetic, even admirable, in their fierce self-assertion. They are conquistadors, passionate exponents of the individualist ethos, who simply have the misfortune to be born on the wrong side of the tracks, and an irreducible rebelliousness that prevents them from crossing over into respectability. Murphy is neither rebel, nor conqueror, nor passionate in anything; he appears emotionally and morally stunted, little more than a

Vietnam, for if the film looks back to an innocence and a self-assurance now lost, the Vietnam war is where America might be said to have lost both.

There is something rather facile about the criticism implied here - and in particular about the implicit equation of the American soldier with the American criminal - and if this were the main focus of the film, it could be dismissed as another, characteristically smug, European indictment of the 'Great Society'. It is to Fassbinder's credit that he goes further than this, to look critically at his *own* activity and cultural situation, with the result that the film becomes its own critique.

Murphy's visit to his mother dramatizes the meeting of two cultures which is the matrix of the film. The mother, aristocratic incarnation of Old World traditions, and the son, coldly functional product of the technological New, meet but find no contact. Between them hovers the neurotic figure of a permanently adolescent younger brother, who still contrives to see in Murphy a hero touched with the glamour of the old America and who is drawn to him by an admiration that verges on adulation. But even for him there can be no real contact. Murphy remains unapproachable, a stranger; and the younger brother is left to wander frenetically between the two emblems of opposing cultures carefully juxtaposed in the house, the pin-table and the piano, unable to reconcile himself exclusively to either. His admiration for Murphy and all that he stands for is not sustained by the present reality; it is arrested in the past just as his own development is arrested at the stage of insecure adolescence.

In this neurotically immature admirer of all things American, Fassbinder seems to parody his own fascination; and the self-criticism is made more explicit in the film's machine for killing, and he kills with the unfeeling perfectionism of the technician. When not on an assignment he is inert, reaching for the whisky bottle not out of an excess of animal vitality but merely mechanically, out of force of weary habit. He seems to represent a world reduced to machines and consumers; and when not active as the former, he is passive as the latter, prostrate on his hotel bed, ringing room-service for his food, his whisky and his women.

History, it seems, has overtaken the gangster hero and his relatively simple, manichean world. And in so far as THE AMERICAN SOLDIER radiates nostalgia, Fassbinder appears to be looking back with something like regret to that phase of American culture in which violent crime could seem almost innocent in its individualistic self-assertion, while its inevitable defeat only affirmed unquestioning faith in the rule of law and the rightness of the country's institutions. It is doubtless not without significance that Murphy is a veteran of final scene. Arriving with his mother just in time to see Murphy trapped and shot down, the younger brother throws himself on the body of his hero and, in an interminable slow-motion sequence, rolls around with him on the ground in front of the left-luggage lockers, to the accompaniment of the theme song 'So much tenderness'. It is a parody of a love scene, something approaching the act of love itself, but an act of love performed with a body that is unmistakably dead. The 'tenderness' is all to no avail: in more than the literal sense, the American gangster hero cannot be revived. To attempt a nostalgic re-creation is merely, in the end, to manipulate inert material.

This closing statement has an air of finality about it, and perhaps Fassbinder is here publicly drawing a line under his reworkings of American themes and genres. Only his new films will tell.

JOHN RIGNALL

THE RITE

RITEN (THE RITE). Sweden 1970. **Dir** Ingmar Bergman. **Sc** I.B. **Phot** Sven Nykvist. **Cast** Ingrid Thulin (Thea), Anders Ek (Sebastian), Gunnar Björnstrand (Hans), Eric Hell (judge). **Production** Svensk Filmindustri. **Dist** Darville Organization. 75 min.

In THE RITE Ingmar Bergman returns to the familiar emotional territory of 'the sensual longing for humiliation' (as one of his characters calls it) so fully explored in A PASSION. The positive and destructive patterns of guilt and abasement are developed in the claustrophobic form of a relatively short television film.

Bergman capitalises on the self-evident 'staginess' of television as a medium - its concentration on the foreground, the relative lack of movement, the insubstantial sets that are never more than a backdrop to create a sense that the film is a game, a ritual itself, a medium where the distinctions between actors and audience are breaking down like the culture from which they spring.

Significantly the most powerful image in this film is not visual but verbal - an image of islands that are simultaneously artificial places of security but also portents of approaching death - the clogging of process whose physiological analogue is that prime disease of modern civilisation, thrombosis.

'We are always having rows in which we are both actors and audience', says one of the characters bitterly. His bleak analysis cuts down to the motive behind such deliberately naked technique. The film is 'about' positions of weakness and positions of power, the dissolving relationship between actor and audience, between the man who condemns and the man condemned.

The film is divided into 'scenes' - recalling Bergman's method in A PASSION where the action is punctuated by interviews with each actor probing his sense of the character he is playing. And this stagey world is presented with a wry self-mockery on Bergman's part, an Eliotic quirk of self-parody creeping out of lines that are gnomic personal statements and rather 'what one expects' from a 'Bergman film'.

It is a work that calls into question the social mores behind judicial decisions of 'obscenity' delivered on works of art and probes the principle of 'judgement' itself - one of the great surviving fetishes of our civilised traditions, a 'rite' itself which has been disastrously compromised in the West by the collapse of moral universals.

The other rite in THE RITE is a sketch by three performers seeking to recapture the primitive mystery and terror of invoking a god immanent in nature. On one hand it is a cabaret piece one step from a strip show, on the other a genuine rite, a drive towards transcending the human, symbolised by savage, otherworldly bird masks worn by the men and the drinking of the image of the god's face reflected in a bowl of blood.

An ailing, ageing judge is called upon to determine whether the act is obscene under laws which he admits have lost their inner moral purpose. He explains to the performers: 'Our laws are antiquated but they must be enforced.' He is aware that he is dying, aware that his body's very smell be-

trays the fact. His 'old father' has just died, he is afraid and has no religious belief and little personal pride with which to face his own imminent death.

Like the judge, the three performers are severely disturbed, their close relationship together a lacerating dynamic of humiliation, hysteria and self-abasement. The oldest actor is an unwilling, accepting party to his wife's affair with his younger partner, who is possessed by obscure sadistic destructive drives. Early in the film we see these at work. After sporadic attempts at lovemaking and conversation in which both woman and man assume momentarily dominant roles, he sits in the middle of the hotel bed, running lighted matches along the edges of sheets the way one fires a newspaper. It is obscure, frightening and self-consciously staged. The next scene, unsinged, he is being interviewed by the judge.

The wife - dependent on her older husband, depended on by the younger man - is painfully vulnerable, a hysterical nymphomaniac who 'plays at being a saint and a martyr'. But Bergman is interested in process rather than character, with the forces generated in personal relationships rather than the fixities of mores, morals or laws.

In individual interviews with each performer the judge is placed in a different role - he is humiliated, the humiliator and finally, with the wife, a rather ineffectual rapist. Finally the rite is performed before him. There is no security in being an audience for him. He is struck before the performance begins and then the primitive terror and mystery is recaptured as he gazes on the face of the god mask on the woman's features - and dies of a heart attack.

In a nutshell this is the bad dream of the film - the return by art to the primitive springs of human culture, similar in trajectory to the self-destructive search for a new freedom undertaken by Mann's artist-figure, Adrien Leverkühn. It is a return that springs 'like a lily from the arsehole of a corpse' (in the words of one of Bergman's characters), out of the body of bourgeois society. It is at the same time the death blow to what remains of that culture and its surviving humanistic values, which are defined for Bergman by the predicament of the judge - without faith, with a failing belief in humane relationships as the only truth, yet prey to dehumanising lusts which link him fatally to the three performers.

The judge admits 'that even in my profession there are elements of cruelty' - the 'lust of cruelty' he calls it later. He realises the extent to which he is compromised. He acts sadistically but also demands to be punished and enjoys his own self-abasement within the carapace of his professional relationship to the case although he is deeply, unprofessionally involved - 'Perhaps I wanted to take part in it.' But despite his humiliation at the end of the film, when he is struck and abased before the actors, he remains a source of tenuous moral strength. He maintains some resources of pride in reason and his own dignity. 'You have struck me and humiliated yourself', he says.

Earlier in the film he goes to a church to 'talk to' a priest rather than confess. To a priest who can offer no help he poignantly reveals his own limited resources - a belief that the only 'warmth' in the world is within the 'frail ring' of human relationships, outside of which there is 'only cruelty'.

The profound conflict in the film is seen with some detachment by Bergman - the collusion between authoritarian reason in a compromised and dying form and a psychic anarchy which is only stabilised by what Fischer would call a 'false myth' and a decadent release from the problems of living or thinking.

Clinically objective, the film refuses to resolve the conflict. Bergman has no final comment on the 'rough beast' lurching to replace the dead judge and what he represents - some guilty decency, reluctant courage. There is a similar refusal to offer any but the most tenuous positives at the end of A PASSION - that film closes on a man unable to find a direction on a road as the medium gradually bleaches out and dissolves. He crouches finally to wait.

Such unrelenting rejection of hope has some courage. If we don't know where we stand, we should admit that - and stand.

JOHN TULLOCH

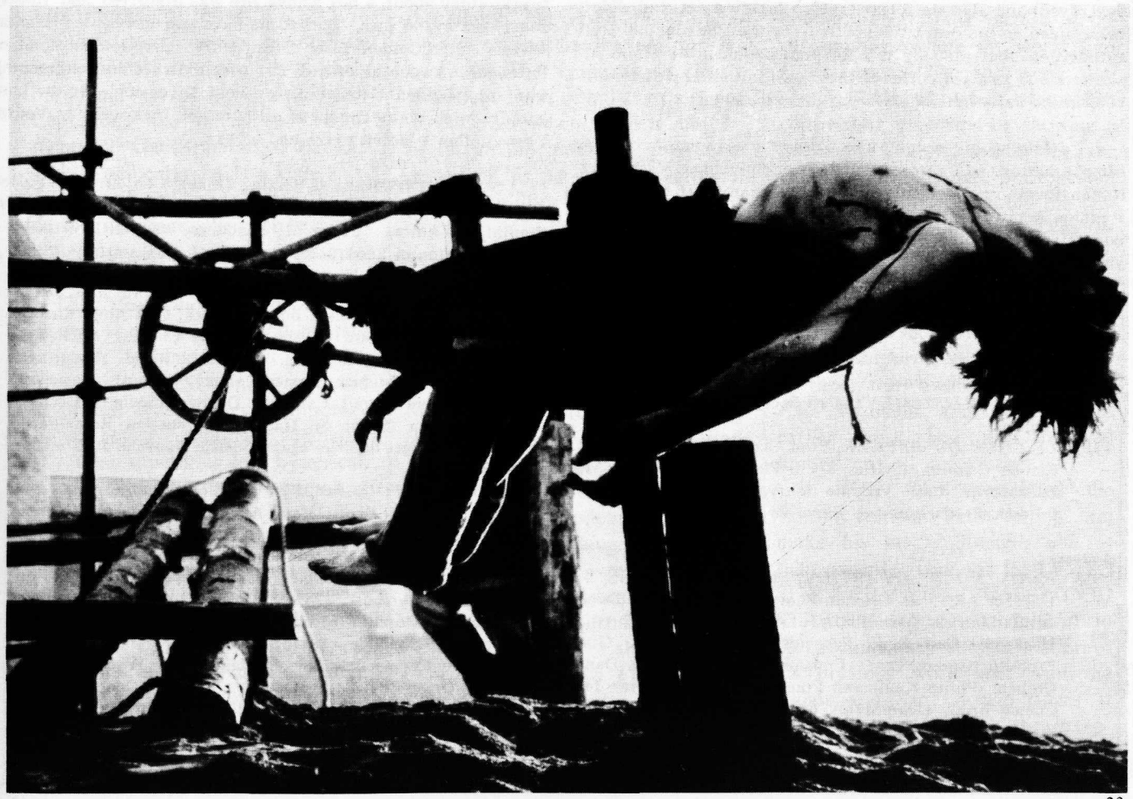
ANDREI RUBLEV

ANDREI RUBLEV. USSR 1966. **Dir** Andrei Tarkovski. **Sc** Andrei Mikhailov-Kontchalovski and A.T. **Phot** Vadim Youssav **Mus** V.Ortchinnikov. **Cast** A.Solonitzine (Rublev), N.Sergeev (Kirill), Irma Raouch (girl), N.Bowliaiev (Boriska). **Production** Mosfilm. Integral version 6 hrs.

The Soviet director, Andrei Tarkovsky, completed his latest feature film ANDREI RUBLEV in 1966. It had a long and difficult road to travel before it reached the screen. The story of the battle for its release runs as follows: after shooting was finished the film was subjected to strict censorship, which resulted in the excision of numerous shots. The effect was to make some of its sequences incoherent, and the film was the object of vehement attacks by some critics while it received accolades from a more discriminating public. It was barred from exhibition in the Soviet Union and may never have been seen anywhere, were it not for the fact that a print had inadvertently been sent to the 1969 Cannes Festival where it was screened 'hors concours'. ANDREI RUBLEV excited and moved all those present at the showing and was subsequently awarded the International Literary Critics' Prize (FIPRESCI). Only then did the representatives of Sovexportfilm agree to sell the picture to a French exhibitor. The print had barely reached Paris when the Soviet negotiators were on the telephone from Moscow demanding that the deal be cancelled. But it was too late. The commotion stirred up by this incident only created greater interest among the public.

ANDREI RUBLEV is a splendid historical canvas of an entire period of Russian history. The time is the 15th century. Russia is a poor, dark and hungry land, torn apart by dissent among its princelings and beset by the Mongol occupiers. But what we see is not only the superficial spectacle of a bygone age, but also its essence - the fate of Russia and its insulted and injured people. This is the film's background. The actual hero of the story is the monk and famous Russian icon-painter,

THE RITE



ANDREI RUBLEV

famous 'Trinity' icon. The film begins with a prologue - an early attempt at flying in a balloon over typical Russian landscapes. We don't know whether the audacious man remained alive. But the key to the film has been given: It is a film replete with scenes of savage cruelty - the eyes of builders who have fled from the Grand Prince to his rival brother's court are gouged, a jester's tongue is torn out, a man is crucified at a crossroads. The dark atmosphere of the film is underlined by the theme of rain and storm and only the end sequence, in vivid colour proclaims the triumph of religion. The film is deeply religious - it is, in fact, the first Soviet film of its kind. That is why it has had no release in Russia till now. The Soviet officials called it 'contrary to historical truth' - at least that was the 'explanation' given at the Belgrade Festival this year when ANDREI RUBLEV was cancelled at the last minute before the screening.

In Andrei Rublev's time religion was very important, the icons were religious pictures which communicated spiritual values to an illiterate people, and naturally the end of the film - the procession with the famous Trinity icon shown in big close-up and colour, was clearly intended as the magnificent affirmation of faith in Christ and gave an impression of a religious triumph which is now, in Russia, absolutely impossible.

RUBLEV is not historical-documentary, archeological, biographical or even an art-historical film. It is more like a free discussion of the spiritual evolution of the great icon-painter. A precise biographical film was hardly possible, because we know almost nothing about Rublev's life. Little remained except a few icons and his legendary fame. Therefore, Tarkovsky was right in basing everything on Rublev's art. The main question of the film is what has given Rublev in his dark time the power to create. The film hints at its deeper meaning, for instance, in the meeting of Rublev with the ghost of his teacher, Theophanes the Greek, shown without any mysticism. To Rublev's question - what the other world looks like? Theophanes answers - Not as you imagine. To Rublev's question - When the storm will end over Russia? - There is no answer ...

The director, Andrei Tarkovsky, now is regarded as one of the best Soviet film-makers. He graduated from the Cinema Institute (VGIK) in Moscow in 1961, and started with a 30-minute short film THE STEAM-ROLLER AND THE VIOLIN (1960) about the friendship between a seven-year-old boy violinist and a worker. The film is a romantic miniature reflecting the major influence of Albert Lamorisse. Tarkovsky's first feature film IVAN'S CHILDHOOD (1962) is the tragic story about a boy whose life was distorted and finally destroyed by the war. Both films have won many international prizes - the Golden Lion of St. Mark, the Golden Head of Palenque, a special award 'for poetic direction condemning war', the Golden Gate prize for Best Direction, for the best camera work (cameraman of all films of Tarkovsky is Vadim Yusov), the Selznick prize and others.

Now, Tarkovsky is making a feature colour film called SOLARIS from a novel by a Polish science fiction writer, Stanislaw Lemm. From all accounts, SOLARIS will be a Soviet version of 2001.

JEANNA VRONSKAYA

Gaining an insight into Rublev's personality was no simple matter, as Tarkovsky and the scriptwriter Mikhalkov-Konchalovski realized fully when they began their task. 'The Passion According To Andrei' (the original title of the picture) consists of ten episodes from the life of Andrei Rublev - his youth, the flowering of his genius, the creation of the world -

JACQUES RIVETTE: a filmography

shorts

1951 *QUADRILLE*. **Prod** Jean-Luc Godard. **Cast** J-L.G., Anne-Marie Cazalis. 16mm.

1952 *LE DIVERTISSEMENT*. **Cast** Sacha Briquet, Olga Waren. 16mm.

1956 *LE COUP DU BERGER*. **Prod** Claude Chabrol. **Scr** J.R., Claude Chabrol, Charles Bitch. **Phot** Charles Bitch. **Mus** F.Couperin. **Cast** Virginie Vitry, Anne Doat, Etienne Loinop. **Production** Les Films de la Pléiade.

features

1958 *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (PARIS BELONGS TO US). **Scr** J.R., Jean Gruault. **Phot** Charles Bitch. **Ed** Denise de Casablanca. **Mus** Philippe Arthuys. **Sound** Christian Hackspill. **Cast** Betty Schneider (Anne Goupil), Giani Esposito (Gérard Lenz), Francoise Prevost (Terry), Daniel Crohem (Philip Kaufman), François Maistre (Pierre), Jean Claude Brialy (Jean-Marc). **Production** AJYM (Les Films du Carosse). 140 min.

1965 *LA RELIGIEUSE* (THE NUN). **Scr** J.R., Jean Gruault, from Diderot. **Ass. Dir** Jean Fourastié. **Phot** Alain Levent. **Sound** Guy Villette. **Dec** Jean-Jacques Fabre. **Mus** Jean-Claude Eloy. **Ed** Denise de Casablanca. **Cast** Anna Karina (Suzanne), Liselotte Pulver (Mme de Chelles), Micheline Presle (Mme de Moni), Francine Bergé (Soeur St Christine), Christine Lenier (Mme Simonin), Francisco Rabal (Dom Morel), Catherine Diamant (Soeur St Cecile), Yori Bertin (Soeur St Thérèse). **Production** Rome-Paris Films, Georges de Beauregard, Société Nouvelle du Cinéma. 129 min.

1968 *L'AMOUR FOU*. **Scr** J.R., Marilou Parolini. **Ass. Dir** Jean Fourastié. **Phot** (35mm) Alain Levent, (16mm) Etienne Becker. **Sound** (35mm) Bernard Aubouy, (16mm) Jean-Claude Laurent. **Mus** Jean-Claude Eloy. **Ed** Nicole Lubritansky. **Cast** Bulle Ogier (Claire), Jean-Pierre Kalfon (Sebastien/Pyrrhus), Josée Dertoop (Marta/Hermione), Michèle Moretti (Michèle), Celia (Celia/Andromaque), Françoise Godde (Francoise/Cleone), Maddly Bomy (Maddly/Cephise), Liliane Bordam (Puck), Yves Beneyton (Yves/Orestes/Pylade), Dennis Berry (Dennis/Pylade/Oreste), Michel Delahaye (Michel/Phoenix), André S. Labarthe (TV-director). **Production** Cocinor-Marceau, Sogexportfilm, Georges de Beauregard. Integral version 4 hrs 12 min.

ERMANNO OLMI

the ethic of individual responsibility by Martin Walsh.

"To become involved with a work of art entails, to be sure, the experience of detaching oneself from the world. But the work of art itself is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched".[1]

I. Ermanno Olmi is the direct heir of the Italian neorealist tradition, despite his lack of any actual cinematic contact with that stream: "My discovery of the cinema had not been when I first set eyes on a camera and lighting equipment, but when I discovered neorealism and the possibility of the cinema for exploring life".[2]

Olmi's description of his stylistic and thematic origins is clearly borne out by his films, and Pierre Leprohon, like others, has commented: "Olmi apparaissait l'un des seuls à demeurer fidèle à cette mission du néoréalisme: peindre la vie de tous les jours, chercher le pathétique des destins, non pas nécessairement médiocres, mais modestes".

This description of neorealism ignores some of its central characteristics: for instance, its tendency toward ideological commitment, and its protest against the contemporary Italian social conditions. Thematically Olmi's work is less hysterical, more maturely considered and reflective than the films of the first neorealist period, 1945–50. In method, however, it has closer affinities: Luigi Chiarini suggests that in the classic neorealist film "The plot becomes simpler, almost disappears in open narration intent on seizing—in situations rather than in episodes—man, his condition, the background against which he acts, historically determined".[4]

This is certainly true of Olmi's cinema, in which the emphasis is not on events, but on people, and their relationship to their environment: the dual themes of work and nature are recurrent motifs in his examination of man's surrender to commercially orientated society, a surrender which has as its concomitant the loss of the creative instinct. Intellectually, Olmi is in strong contrast to his neorealist predecessors. Not only is there a total lack of didactic political commitment, but his social commentary (in IL POSTO, for example) focusses not on the evils of an unwieldly, stifling bureaucratic machinery, but upon the responsibility of each individual for his own life. This emphasis is clearly consistent with Olmi's experience of his environment, and it may be useful at this point to give some details of his personal background, as there is little in English on his career.

II. Olmi was born in 1931, of peasant/worker stock. His father died during the war, and Olmi and his mother both commenced to work at the Edisonvolta Company in Milan shortly afterwards. During these years as a clerk (a period which is delicately recalled in IL POSTO) Olmi developed an interest in the theatre, studying acting for a while, and gaining a technical expertise in his work as stage manager of several amateur comedies and musicals, such as Bossano's *Pelicano Ribelle*, Labiche's *Un Capello di Paglia di Firenze* (*The Italian Straw Hat*), Giradoux's *L'Apollon de Bellac*, and even Thornton Wilder's *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* (translated as *Felice Viaggio*). That his work in the theatre was important to his film career only in his acquisition of technical knowledge is clear from the total absence of theatrical effect in his feature films and (presumably) his short documentary films, which he commenced making in 1953, when he joined the film section of the Edison Company. In the next eight years he completed about 40 documentaries for Edison (none of which I've seen). This was his period of cinematic apprenticeship, and by all accounts his formative period both stylistically and thematically. Of these films, one critic has said that they give "an intelligent and frank picture of the surroundings where the workers of a big concern live and work, presenting different types of people, confronting problems or showing a profound comprehension for the small happenings that, put together, make up a life" Probably the best of these works are *La Diga de Ghiacciaio* (1954), *Mannon: Finestra due* (1956), *Tre Fili Fino a Milano* (1958), *Il Grande Paese d'Acciaio* (1960) and *Un Metro e Lungo Cinque* (1961). The last two of these won awards at Industrial Film Festivals, and some of his earlier work had also received limited critical recognition.

In 1959 Olmi persuaded the Edison company into letting him make his first full-length film at their expense. This was IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (TIME STOOD STILL) and remained faithful to the documentary subject matter of his previous work—and won the Cidale and San Giorgio prizes at Venice that year. With the exception of one film, E VENNE UN UOMO (A MAN CALLED

JOHN) (1965), in which he used Rod Steiger, Olmi has consistently adhered to the principals evinced in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO, and which derive from the neorealist tradition: unobtrusive camera work, and the use of non-professional actors. Olmi has explained his use of non-actors quite succinctly: "If I use professional actors as intermediaries, I lose the chance to convey the truth, because those actors are followed by the public not for the characters they represent on the screen, but because the actors themselves are a model of success in our society".[5]

Olmi's integrity here is mirrored in his attitude to the form and content of his films: "Many of our men of culture who wish to express their ideas through the cinema, end by debasing the medium in this way: they put over their 'message' in thrillers, erotic stories, romantic fables. This is not serious, indeed it is dishonest".[6]

Olmi's increasing control over his material evinces his essential seriousness: his most recent film, I RECUPERANTI, Olmi scripted, edited, and photographed himself. At no time has he followed any æsthetic or ideological cinematic creed, and has steered clear of the 'official' film industry, as he emphasised by his part in the founding of '24 Horses' and '22 Decembre'—two groups of young writers and technicians who came together in Milan to make intelligent pictures at low cost. Indeed the very names of the companies testify to their disavowal of grandiose commercial production.

III. The two themes of 'work' and 'nature' are tentatively formulated in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (1959). The film is a psychological examination of two men guarding a dam, against a backdrop of snow and mountains, and its two actors were the actual guardian of the dam, and a young man who worked on the administrative side of Edison. The physical setting of the drama is established at the outset: the ice, snow, mountains, dominating the little hut in which we witness the old man's meticulous ordering of his world; it is a severe failure of order when the clock stops—and we recognise it as such, as we are rapidly drawn into empathy with the old man's diligent responsiveness to his environment. The old man's world is one of habit, of geometric order (c.f. the precision of his laying the table for dinner), but it is not one that excludes awareness of his surroundings: note his setting of the animal trap after observing footprints in the snow. The arrival of the young boy as a replacement for the old man's usual colleague is the catalyst that provides the core of the film: the establishing of a real relationship between the two protagonists. The boy initially represents a total disruption of the established order: he hammers shelves, bounces on a squeaky bunk, rebuilds in grandoise fashion the old man's subtle animal trap; all this is observed with great warmth by Olmi; humour is the predominant mood. Stylistically it is characteristic Olmi; the camera is present simply as an observer, moves little, does not attempt to refashion events through cutting or unexpected angles. But its point of view is not static: in the opening scenes we are drawn into empathy with the old man; when the boy arrives we, too, feel jolted; but shortly we become more detached, we can laugh at both man and boy, because we watch from outside their specific situation. Thus when Olmi shows us first the old man furtively examining the boy's book, and then the boy examining the old man's book, we recognise Olmi's deliberate structuring of our point of view and response. But the sort of detachment we attain is far from the ascetic rigour of a Robert Bresson film: we move easily back into seeing the situation from the old man's point of view: thus when the boy plays his rock 'n roll record, the camera tilts and swivels, miming the old man's feelings, only regaining its customary stability when the record ends.

The old man is irritated by the disruption of his vision of order: he is unaware of the boy's difficulty in adapting to this new and isolated environment. It is only when the avalanche rumbles, that the old man senses the boy's unease. It is through the 'conflict' with the natural order, the avalanche which precipitates the power failure, and the snow storm, that they finally achieve understanding of each other. The power failure forces the two of them to drain water away by hand: for the first time their efforts are synchronised. And when they flee the hut in the snow-storm, and struggle to the church, they sleep with their heads on the same pillow, after the old man has taken on a role of father-figure to the disturbed and scared boy. The old man fully adopts this paternal role: when the torch battery goes flat, he lights the church candles, for the boy's peace of mind; and the following morning he carried the boy back to the hut, to spare him the cold. The final shot of the film is a long shot (our essential detachment from the lives of either one being stated again) of the hut, with the sound of the boy's rock music blaring out: now, however, the old man can accept it. He has been aroused from the complacency of his life of habit, and forced into a human relationship that takes him beyond the order imposed by his work. The old man's work (guarding a dam) has resulted in his adoption of a specific, exclusive life-style; the boy comes to work also (though his real intention, he claims, is to study (another sort of work)); this work is the one common factor between them, but is not, in itself, sufficient to provide a bond between them. Instead, the natural environment, the snow and the mountains, must bring them to an understanding they couldn't otherwise have attained.

IV. The motif of 'nature' plays almost no part in IL POSTO (1961), the first of Olmi's films to receive widespread critical recognition. At one point Domenico and Magali run through a park together, a moment that is in strong contrast to the predominantly technological and bureaucratic context of the rest of the film, but the rural environment has no further significance thematically; similarly in I FIDANZATI, the rain at the end, pointing to Giovanni's emotional resolution, acts as a cathartic metaphor for the establishment of a real relationship with his fiancee Liliana, but does not run as a motif

throughout the film. Instead, what we find in IL POSTO and I FIDANZATI is an emphasis upon the impingement of the commercial environment upon human relationships. In the case of IL POSTO, this results in a more oblique 'statement'. Olmi, while criticising the industrial world that depersonalises people (the desperate cry of the office worker, towards the end, "I've been working under this lamp for twenty years . . ."), simultaneously views it with remarkable sympathy. Domenico, the central figure, does not undergo any change of awareness during the course of the film, which spans the time between his application for a job, and the allocation to him of a desk, at which he will probably sit for much of his life.

The film's central theme is the frustration of human feelings by the social context, work: the relationship between Domenico and Magali sadly fades away, as they are unable to meet at work: their lunch-breaks are at different times, she dares not stop to talk to him for long for fear of upsetting her boss. Structurally, the influence of the environment, and the relationship between Domenico and Magali is carefully modulated. The film opens with Domenico's family, crowded in a small house, worrying about 'the job': it is a crucial day, for a job equals money, equals economic survival. The applicants for the job are examined in a huge gilded hall that seems to mock at their lowly aspirations. At lunch-time Domenico meets Magali, and the potential for a meaningful human interaction emerges, set against a more austere backdrop, such as the man in the café, reading a newspaper that headlines only violence and depression.

Back at the interviews, the reality of their relationship is put into focus by contrast with the interviewer's ludicrous questioning: "Does your future seem hopeless . . . Did you wet your bed as a child". But it is this latter tone of impersonal triviality that increasingly dominates the film, as the potentiality of Domenico's affair with Magali disintegrates. The long corridors of the office, the scraping subservience of the doormen to their superiors, the blank wall at which Domenico

IL POSTO

stares for his first days of sterile 'work' leads only to the impotence of the New Year's Eve Dance. The hall is huge and empty, with Domenico a lone figure, still, pathetically, in his raincoat (the raincoat which had looked so fine in the shop window when he was with Magali, and which now, on his frail body, reveals only the discrepancy between the hope and the reality). Like Antonioni, Olmi will not abbreviate the sequence, but makes us wait and wait, with Domenico, for more people to fill fill the hall; and even when they do arrive, we experience the tedium and disillusion, rather than having it presented to us through deft editing of events. The office staff do their best to enjoy themselves, the band-leader hopelessly exhorts them to make this "a night we must never forget", but the overwhelming tone is one of stultification, fear of communication, of couples dancing in a shyly insinuating manner.

The disintegration of real personal contact continues in the final section of the film; a clerk dies, and his desk is cleared. He had been attempting to write a novel in his lonely life outside the office; a couple of chapters are in his desk, and are, predictably, incomprehendingly tossed aside. Then a pathetic squabble over the desk occurs, before the final shot of Domenico sitting at his desk, with the desultory mechanical clanking of the duplicator presaging the monotonous anonymity of his years ahead; the possibility of anything else has been eroded away during the course of the film.

What, then, is the positive element of the film? It lies, I think, in the nature of Olmi's vision, not in his ability to create a sense of thwarted human potential, but in his recognition of the essential humour that can rise above the objective physical situation, towards an emotionally **alive** response to the environment. It is the very humourlessness of the office world that precludes meaningful communication. Olmi has said "Work is not a damnation for man. It is his chance to express himself, the average person's opportunity to be creative. But work as it is organised becomes a condemnation. It annuls man".[7]

In IL POSTO, work 'annuls man', because man resigns himself to a total passivity within the machine; he cannot even laugh at himself. Olmi's gentle humour (the fat man staring at an equally huge bottle of wine in a shop window, a clerk solemnly cutting cigarettes in half in order to 'economise') is born of detachment, a standing away from the event, to see it for what it is. No character in IL POSTO achieves this detachment (apart

from the cynical clerk), but that it is necessary is emphasised by the fact that in Olmi's subsequent films (A MAN CALLED JOHN excepted) the change that takes place in the protagonist is always brought about by his standing back and looking in upon his situation from a point of detachment.

V. This is precisely the process of I FIDANZATI (1963), whose opening reiterates the dance motif of IL POSTO, in a very similar mood; it forms the credit sequence, the dance hall gradually fills up with people sitting around the edge of the sawdusted floor; everyone looks glumly on as the blind pianist is led in, and the overweening air of sterility and sadness continues as the dancers commence to shuffle crisply, mechanically around the hall. There is however one factor that distinguishes this episode from its predecessor in IL POSTO; although the air of melancholy remains, Giovanni, the protagonist of the film, is in restrospect to see this occasion with affection, as a significant connection with his fiancee Liliana, whom he leaves behind in Milan when he takes up a new job in Sicily. Their relationship has subsided into routine, lacks spontaneity, and it is only when Giovanni enters an unfamiliar environment—the harsh factory landscapes of newly industrialised Sicily—that he begins to rediscover his real intuitive emotions towards Liliana. It is the rebirth of their love for each other that provides the narrative core of the film, but it is structured far more complexly than either IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO or IL POSTO. The crucial innovation is what has been termed the 'flashback', but this is not precisely true: what we witness are present-time memories in the minds of Giovanni and Liliana; we remain in the same time-scale throughout the film, and witness the evolution of their thoughts and feelings in chronological continuity. Nevertheless, the use of this form by Olmi marks a new mode of psychological exposition in his work that always evades the self-consciousness of, for instance, Resnais, while evincing a discreetly profound awareness of the working of the mind.

As Giovanni struggles to come to terms with his new job, he recalls incidents of his past: the dance, whose piano and accordion music pervades much of the film, providing an essential continuity throughout: a carnival in Milan the previous year that he enjoyed with Liliana. The gentle 'togetherness' of these past events contrasts with the deserted café that blares its music to no one, with the bleak impersonality of his hotel, and its empty dining-rooms. Throughout the film the camera observes events very much from Giovanni's point of view, hence emphasising the alienation he feels in this strange environment. His responses to this stark world are painstakingly followed through: his alienation is established through the slow pace of the action, his awe at the size and grandeur of movement of the machines. At one point there is an accident, and an ambulance arrives to fetch the injured worker. our view of the episode is Giovanni's, we see the ambulance arrive in the yard way below us, and like Giovanni, we are not allowed a glimpse inside the ambulance. We experience his detachment from events around him.

Olmi's characteristic humour also plays its part; in the hotel for instance, we watch Giovanni tentatively begin to join in some light-hearted horseplay in the corridors—but before he even does anything he is 'caught in the act' by an angry guest: we laugh even while recognising his essential exclusion from the camaraderie of his fellow-workers. Gradually he begins to feel more at home in this environment, but its concomitant is the re-establishment of his relationship with Liliana, first by postcard, then by letter, and finally by phone: their recognition of their need for each other is only due to Giovanni's initial detachment from his accustomed habitat, as I suggested initially. At the same time we note the recurrence of the 'work' motif: work is clearly seen as not being a self-sufficient mode of existence, human relationships being of paramount importance. In this sense, I FIDANZATI is conceptually an advance on IL POSTO, as the relations between work and emotion are clearly stated: only when there exists a spiritual contact between people, can a viable working situation be established. Stated bluntly like this, the film may appear intellectually clichéd, but when the conceptual intentions are as delicately integrated with the narrative structure as Olmi achieves, we can only wonder at the subtle penetration of his mind, whose art seems almost dedicated to concealing his art, such is the discretion of his touch.

VI. The discretion of Olmi's finest art was emphasised by its absence in A MAN CALLED JOHN (1965), a film that through its atypicality of subject and structure suggested the strength of Olmi at his best. His first feature film in colour, it attempted to tell the story of Pope John XXIII played by Rod Steiger. Olmi admits the film's failure: "My mistake was in trying to make a film that was all thought. You can't just put a man sitting there and try to convey his thoughts with words and images of the places he lived".

The characteristic languid pace is lacking, as Olmi tries to give a total impression of the Pope's entire life, instead of committing himself to a thorough examination of a single episode (as in IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO, I RECUPERANTI, etc.). The attempts to link John's travels in Bulgaria (when he was a Bishop) to his youth via flashbacks to his peasant family lack **dramatic** motivation (unlike I FIDANZATI or UN CERTO GIORNO) while reasserting the theme of spiritual wealth as derivative of humble closeness to nature: the consequence of this uneasy imposition of thematic demands upon the film's form is a tendency toward sentimentality. Similarly, Olmi's use of yellow, red and green filters over black and white newsreel footage betrays an uncharacteristic hesitancy toward his material. Too often, as in John's spiritual doubts, his feelings of mortification and humiliation, we feel a ponderously unrealised dramatic intent on Olmi's part. Nevertheless there are sequences of beauty in the first half of the film; these principally reside in the superb evocation of John's peasant origins, the authentic vineyard scenes, the carnival processions, the religious ceremonies of the humble peasant world. All this bears the unassuming, honest quality of an ethnographic documentary. Gradually, however, the honesty and humility of these peasants becomes sentimentalised as Olmi attempts a conceptual equation between the peasants' integrity and the spiritual striving of the young Pope—John's white robes as he hunts pumpkins with his friends acquires unfortunate symbolic overtones that hang over too much of the film. The lesson of A MAN CALLED JOHN for Olmi was clear, and emphasises the nature of his artistic gift: his ability to communicate the essence of human situations with which he can identify. The life of the Pope proved to be a subject where Olmi's lack of first-hand experience resulted in over-schematisation of the narrative. His return to the world of the Edison company in UN CERTO GIORNO (1968) marked a return to the sources of his inspiration, and is his only film to date that deals with the life of the executive, rather than the humble employee.

VII. One of the themes of A MAN CALLED JOHN, the superiority of spiritual health over material wealth is initially inverted in UN CERTO GIORNO, at any rate in the eyes of the protagonists, who are concerned with gaining a lucrative commission for their advertising agency. By the end of the film, however, Bruno has been forced into a position of detachment from this environment, through a car accident, and has to a certain extent reasserted the necessity for mental fitness, self-awareness. This self-awareness mitigates against simple optimism, as the final shots of the film suggest: Bruno sits exhausted, watching television, on which we see first a drill pounding, then the image judders as the vertical hold on the screen is maladjusted: the image thus insistently repeats itself, before we see an explosion in the landscape. The parallel between Bruno's mental state and the physical devastation of the land is clear, though there is also implicit

a qualified optimism: the explosions clearing the land may make way for a finer environment, just as Bruno's evolving awareness of his condition may lead to a superior 'quality of life'. The close relationship between the individual and the social condition that is postulated in this closing sequence is evident throughout the film, and is structurally closer than in his previous work, more closely woven into the narrative progression.

This statement may be clarified by reference once again to the theme of nature. In A MAN CALLED JOHN Nature appears as the necessary ethnic background to a man of spiritual vitality; in UN CERTO GIORNO, the countryside is seen as something that is external to the commercial context, but desirable. Bruno has a house in Tuscany, where he can retire for weekends, with his dogs. Olmi's attitude to these sequences is curiously, but explicably, ambivalent. On the one hand there is the affectionately lyrical photography of the countryside, the misty beauty of Tuscany; associated with images of vitality (the dogs, the horses, the girls). On the other hand, the tensions and sickness of the business world, embodied in Bruno, and its implicit distortion of values casts a pall over the inherent romanticism of the sequence. Bruno, manifestly, has not got an easy 'relationship' with his country

retreat. In fact Olmi clearly gives us a series of opposites to balance off against each other; this operates not simply on the existential level of city/country, but also in terms of his stylistic presentation. The early scene at the conference table has a remarkable vigour, particularly in its editing—but it is a vigour that deliberately confuses, disorientates. It is mimetic of Davoli's collapse; we see the flashing projector, faces, then an out-of-focus shot of his own face, gradually readjusting into focus—it is a very precise way of conveying Davoli's feeling of nausea and confusion. The exhaustive vigour of all this is in strong contrast to the natural vigour of Tuscany. The connection between the two is made explicit by the image of the dogs, who are in a cage and have to be let out—a move from restrictive vitality to unfettered vitality. The implication is that Bruno must undergo a similar release, in order to rediscover "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower". Not that Bruno is to attain any idyll; on the contrary, his new awareness will be a sobering one—but it will have integrity, rather than self-deception as its root.

Our point of view of Bruno is not always detached: Olmi retains his ability to make us experience **with** Bruno—as in the car accident

which is the crux of the film. Like Bruno, we are not aware of the accident until after the event (hence we, like the jury, tend to clear him of guilt). Our identification with Bruno in the accident leads us to a fuller comprehension of his self-questioning afterwards, as the precariousness of his position becomes apparent; this is assisted by Olmi's development of his quasi-flashback technique. Where in A MAN CALLED JOHN we watched John, as he recalled incidents of his childhood, in an intellectually static manner, in UN CERTO GIORNO the technique is used to delineate Bruno's evolving comprehension of events: past occurrences now appear in new light in his mind, as we witness his engagement with the bases of his previously self-deluding life.

The idea that we only become aware of **how** we live, **who** we are, when something serious happens is not only reiterated verbally; after the hauntingly tender flashbacks, there arises a new delicacy, discretion in Bruno's relationships with people—the night watchman at the factory, the doctor. The frail innocence of Bruno's daughter, dark-haired and beautiful, somehow crystallises Bruno's new cognition, while counterpointing his essential sadness. We find a similar effect in the presentation of Bruno's home: visually, there is a new precision of outline, for instance the green bottle and glass which stand out against the cream tile background: this clarity is at once at odds with Bruno's spiritual confusion, while suggesting the new clarity of vision he is in the process of attaining. Bruno's dignity is counterpointed with the pompous inventiveness of the lawyers, whose witty romanticisation of both language and events increasingly reveals their moral deviousness.

VIII. Olmi's method, the technique of his narrative exposition reaches a new level of sophistication in its fusion of visual and thematic motifs, in UN CERTO GIORNO, while remaining true to his characteristic mode. This stylistic complexity is not present in Olmi's most recent film, I RECUPERANTI (1969) which he made for television. Thematically, however, it remains true to Olmi's 'œuvre', in some ways returning to the dramatic situation of IL TEMPO SI E FERMATO (an encounter between an older and a younger man). But the concept of 'communion with nature' is here quite explicit, placing the concept of work directly within the natural environment: the two scavengers search for scrap metal, principally bomb shrapnel, on the green mountain sides. The characteristic situation of detachment from one's accustomed habitat, is established at the outset: Gianni returns home after the war, to find the family unit ruptured, for Gianni's father has married a woman many years his junior, a fact Gianni cannot accept; and his brother is on the point of emigrating to Australia. Along with this disorientation there is the problem of work: there is none without the requisite 'authorization': work is seen by the state not as a means of self-expression, but purely as an economic/bureaucratic necessity (the lumberjacks are not allowed to fell trees).

In contrast to the strictures of bourgeois conformity, we meet Old Du, the old scavenger, who is "against all boundaries", and whose context is the sheerly physical environment of rocks, boulders, trees and water. Self-expression is at a premium: sound is an act of freedom—one can shout, sing, one can push boulders down mountains for the pure exhilaration it affords. Old Du's ethic is to live for the moment—but it is an ethic of integrity that contrasts sharply against the attitude of Gianni's girl-friend, who won't accept her man's scavenging as being a job—though Gianna won't at this point relinquish his new-found dignity. Old Du's eyes "see under the stones" — beyond the surface appearances, and this is a faculty that is the result of experience, the gradual acquisition of knowledge that gives meaning to life. All this is not without humour (Gianni attempting to introduce an element of 'technology' into their scavenging) or irony: they are working, for instance, on ground where many men have trod, the grass is so green because it grows on human flesh, the carnage of war and man's follies. But even the life of Old Du is not without danger: the danger of unexploded bombs—but this very risk is one justification for living: "against knowledge is fate" and "we never have enough knowledge" says Old Du, justifying his dismantling of the bombs.

Gianni relinquishes his partnership with Old Du, and returns to the village to work on a building site, and reclaim the affections of his girl-friend. Old Du finds him there, they argue, and Old Du returns to the mountains, singing to the hills. The ending is perhaps ambiguous: but Gianni's rejection of scavenging as a way of life is not so much a rejection of its metaphysical values, as it is an absorption of those values into his attitudes. Gianni's re-entry into what Old Du terms "the stupid bourgeois" is from a new vantage of self-knowledge and spiritual health: Gianni is in some way "a new man", just as Old Du is the embodiment of what Olmi cries out for in his films: a man who maintains a creative relationship with his work, and thus fulfils himself.

Thematically I RECUPERANTI is the summation of Olmi's work, in his examination of the complex relationship between man, work, the natural environment, and the responsibility of each individual for the qualitative nature of that relationship. The formal prerequisite of the protagonist's detachment, isolation, from his habitual milieu (whether a mental or physical detachment), is present as in the earlier films, and provides the 'alienation' necessary for man to achieve a new and vital comprehension of his existence. These are the schematic bases of Olmi's films; as we have seen, each film approaches these bases from a different angle, but their essential pertinence to an understanding of the work of this gentle master in the tradition of Renoir is manifest.

NOTES
1. Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p.28, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1967.
2. 'Ermanno Olmi: a conversation with John Francis Lane', Sight and Sound, Vol. 39, No. 3.
3. Pierre Leprohon, 'Le Cinema Italien', p.214, Editions Seghers, Paris, 1966.
4. Luigi Chiarini, entry on 'Neorealism', from Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo.
5. 'Ermanno Olmi: a conversation with John Francis Lane', loc. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid
8. Ibid

Cinema and Politics

French Film Culture and Critical Theory

Cinéthique

Although a bridge isn't built so that people can commit suicide from it, there will always be those who insist on using it to this end.
Cinéthique, No. 6.

One of the more engaging features of contemporary French criticism is the way in which structuralism and semiology are giving a new impulse to an old ambition: to get to grips with the real world by trying to catch it in the 'simulacrum' of a descriptive-analytical paraphrase. Around this effort a mythology is taking shape—that of rendering social facts transparent, legible, and as a consequence, amenable to change—which casts an interesting light on the still predominantly Hegelian drift and inspiration of French intellectual life.

Not that the secret aspiration of turning the world into a book was ever explicitly stated, it has to be read 'between the lines' of a figurative - metaphorical language that speaks of 'texte', 'écriture', 'lisibilité', and it announces itself by the modest disclaimers which (oddly enough) accompany the ever-swelling flow of elucidatory prose in journals and magazines like a leitmotif: "More work needs to be done"—"il y a ici un travail à faire qui ne s'est pas encore fait" are phrases emerging in semiological writing as regularly as the snorkel of a skin-diver coming up for air. It is only a pity that breath is taken too often at a juncture in the argument where the more sceptical reader expects some kind of pay-off for his own pains, if only in the form of an applicable critical proposition or a verifiable concrete example. Such a disappointed reader is evidently starting from quite different cultural and intellectual premisses.

For the assumption that there exists a totality to be constituted gives rise to the hope that any lacunæ in exegesis, any pockets of resistence against limpid transparency, so to speak, will be flushed out in time, so long as the common pursuit is steadily kept in view, which is, to lay the groundwork of a future epistemological 'architecture', by conducting—to use another recurrent metaphor—an 'archæology' of the present. Others, more meticulous in their very ambitiousness, are stonemasons working on a cathedral: they may never hope to see the completed edifice, but they have at least chiselled their own slab to perfection.

In England (with one or two exceptions) no such mythology, or any comparable pride in intellectual craftsmanship has yet started to blossom. Some may count this a blessing, others are deploring the excessive modesty of an intellectual tradition which has made speculative thinking a thoroughly disreputable mental habit. So widespread is this aversion to any form of system-building here that, say, a debate as to whether the cinema is an art-form like literature or painting, a communication system like radio or television, or an ideological tool serving the bourgeoisie, would be virtually meaningless, since it is only within a general critical theory that these options assume some kind of poignancy.

This debate, however, about use and function of the cinema, is taking place with renewed vigour in France, and although the respective fronts seem perhaps still blurred with the smoke of battle, anyone concerned about the state of film-criticism (which after all, is one legitimate way of being concerned about the state of the modern cinema) could do worse than acquaint himself with some of the basic points at issue. At the same time, the difference in mood and critical temper among intellectuals in France compared with that of their British counterparts, especially the feeling of confidence in getting nearer towards a comprehensive critical theory, on which, however, a doctrinaire and somewhat uptight political commitment is uneasily grafted (resulting from the sharp politicisation of literature and the arts in the wake of May '68)—has to be taken into account when pronouncing verdict on some of the more recondite topics opposing French cinéphiles. Importing ideas from abroad is always a hazardous business—like bringing a bottle of rouge ordinaire back from a holiday. By the time you want to drink it, your wine has very likely turned to vinegar. And without anything comparable to 'les événements' in this country, a lot of what, for example, Louis Althusser has to say, tastes very dry indeed.

In Paris, on the other hand, Althusser's work on the fundamentals of Marxist epistemology, his efforts to clarify the logical foundations of dialectical materialism by distinguishing more rigorously between what is 'scientific' and what is 'ideological' in traditional Marxist philosophy, has had an impact on literary and æsthetic thought which obviously corresponds to a social experience wanting clarification. With it goes a reappraisal of the function of culture in a 'non-idealist' (theory of) society, basing itself on a critique of present-day culture and its philosophical implications. Among Althusser's more extreme disciples, this has become a somewhat obsessive 'search and destroy' mission, with forays into the social myths, attitudes, reflex-responses, artistic conventions, values, concepts, etc. that are deemed ideologically infested (i.e. constituted in structural analogy to bourgeois-capitalist economic practice). The

cinema, halfway between highbrow cultural fetish and cheap mass entertainment, national-international industry reeking with money as well as medium for individual artistic expression, is of course an almost irresistible target for such an ideological critique, especially if one accepts—as some of these critics do—the enormously formative influence which the cinema exerts on the visual imagination, and by extension, on the structuring of the unconscious mind. The usefulness of this kind of work for any general theory of society is without doubt considerable, and it is a field where semiologists are making a significant contribution. The question is, whether a particular film is nothing but an ideologically saturated "message", and whether from such an analysis any prescriptive rules can be deduced about what kind of films we ought to have (make), if we want to change society. But first to the evidence . . .

In spite of the habitually left-wing orientation of massive areas in France's intellectual geography, it is nonetheless surprising to see that the three most polemically-minded film magazines (*Positif, Cahiers du Cinéma, Cinéthique*) are all now sharing political views which in this country would count as Marxist—a fact that does nothing to reduce the surfaces of mutual friction. While *Positif* represents a generation of non-CP Marxists and socialists whose critical views and preferences have been cemented by numerous ideological and political skirmishes (especially against the *nouvelle vague*), and who have remained unimpressed by semiology, and largely sceptical vis à vis Althusser when applied to the cinema, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* have been egging each other on to wilder and wilder revolutionary fervour, ever since *Cinéthique* was founded late in 1968 by a group which (then) had close association with *Tel Quel*. This literary magazine attached to the prestigious Seuil publishing house is dedicated to what it calls a 'materialist' theory of literature, and is headed by Phillipe Sollers, who (not the only paradox of the French scene) has (or had?) as two devoted followers the intrepid Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, the present editors of the ideologically refurbished *Cahiers*. Under the tutelage of *Tel Quel, Cinéthique* began to fight for a 'proletarian, materialist' cinema.

Strategical alliances and factional splits within the various neo-Marxist groups (to which one has to add *Change* and *Preuves*, along with *Tel Quel* and the two film journals) are apparently as easily made as they are resolved, and if there is somewhere among semiologues and structuralists a sense of community, of critics and artists working on an identical task and inspired by a similar goal (which one is occasionally tempted to envy), there is also an even more apparent rivalry that has a way of exploding into demarcation disputes and dog-fights of staggering passion. Certainly, it helps to give a personal edge to the diverse theoretical axes being ground—so much so that for example in an article entitled "Du Bon Usage de la Valeur d'Echange—les *Cahiers du Cinéma* et le Marxisme-Leninisme" (*Cinéthique* No. 6) the author, Marcelin Pleynet, frequently refers to himself by his surname, in the course of an argument designed to demonstrate that *Cahiers* are abusing his 'texts' by trading them unfairly as an exchange value on the stock-market of literary reputations. In such a tense atmosphere a critic is likely to feel himself shooting down a river already gurgling with rapids, while there are plenty of people around who not only take the trouble, but visibly the pleasure to rock his boat as vigorously as they can. No wonder that occasionally he will hang on to what, from a more dispassionate point of view, are straws in the wind.

High-spirited polemical campaigns have of course an established place in France's cultural tradition. They are conducted, despite the occasional savagery, according to pretty well accepted rules, and they possess a kind of cyclical, ritualistic quality. For example, Pleynet in the said article is accusing *Cahiers* of illegitimately taking the position of *Tel Quel* in order to foist on *Cinéthique* the role of *La Quinzaine Littéraire* from a previous passage of arms. Nonetheless, the principal target of the last two years, *Cahiers*, and in particular the much-harassed Comolli, is navigating an especially frail craft. Once the stronghold of a phenomenologically defined, existentialist oriented criticism inherited from André Bazin, and often uncharitably ridiculed for confusing in its delirious pieces the screen of the Cinematheque Rue d'Ulm with the tabernacle of Notre-Dame, *Cahiers du Cinéma* have taken their left-left course in '69, after quite a long period of relative uncertainty in the middle ground of the extended interview—a form of cinéphilism which vis à vis the various 'jeunes cinemas', the Underground, the Cinema Nôvo all but usurped the place of critical analysis in the magazine.

Thus, the suspicion that the Marxist-Leninist line of the present équipe was adopted partly to avoid getting buried in the ideological landslide of '68 has not been entirely dispelled by lengthy editorials (see No. 216/217, reprinted in *Screen*, Spring 1971), assuring the readers that present policy has naturally developed from their work in preceding years, and that it represented the beginning of a thorough review of *Cahiers'* position and aims. *Positif* took this opportunity to renew, with considerable relish, the old quarrel (see *Positif* No. 122, "Les Enfants du Paradigme" by Robert Benayoun, and *Cahiers'* rejoinder in No. 124) which had around 1962 (in the days of the Algerian war) come to a head in a damaging and now famous attack on the pseudo-theological tenets underlying Bazin's conception of the cinema (*Positif* Nos. 46 and 47 "Les Délices de l'Ambiguité—Eloge à André Bazin" by Gérard Gozlin, partly reprinted in P. Graham, *The New Wave*, Cinema One, 1968).

Both *Positif* and *Cinéthique* (though otherwise hardly on speaking terms) are still waiting insistently for *Cahiers'* autocritique, promised in '69, and have, in the meantime, accused the editors of practicing an unprincipled, free-for-all leftism, which is incoherent on the level of theory, because the old critical laxness and inexactitude has simply been dressed up in a fashionably

semiotic vocabulary (*Positif*), and of pandering to an individualist *anarchisant* left-wing deviationism, particularly in the films they approve of (*Cinéthique;* à propos a *Cahiers* interview with Marco Ferreri: "entreprise de recupération [gauchiste] qui se fonde sur l'ignorance éperée des lecteurs . . ." —No. 6 p.3). Since then, the constellation has shifted yet again: after Benayoun's scathing piece in *Positif*, it is now *Cinéthique, Cahiers* and *Tel Quel* who have temporarily made common cause in order to defend Marxism-Leninism against *Positif's* allegedly social-democratic reformism.

To what extent *Cahiers* has in fact held its own as a serious film magazine during the last six years after the American cinema was officially given the coup de grâce (see *Cahiers* No. 172, Nov. 1965 "Vingt Ans Après"), we hope to discuss in a future article. Here we are chiefly concerned with *Cinéthique*, being a relative newcomer, and the least accessible of the three in Britain. Nos. 5 and 6 seem to be the most instructive, in so far as they set out explicitly to systematize the contributions of the previous issues, and make an attempt to outline a general position. (No. 9/10, another policy issue, was unfortunately not available for closer study at the time of writing.)

If *Cahiers* may be faulted for its eclecticism regarding the films it chooses to review, and a certain cavalier way in which it used to fabricate an auteur one day, only to throw him to the dogs the next ("A bas John Ford—vive William Wyler" is still *Cahiers'* most notorious critical blunder), no comparable latitude of judgement can be detected in *Cinéthique*, which—with a ruthless purism that inspires awe—has only admitted the following films into its pantheon (even Eisenstein's work is flawed by an inexcusable idealism): MEDITERRANNEE, OCTOBRE A MADRID, LE JOUEUR DE QUILLES, UN FILM COMME LES AUTRES—all made in recent years and by people (Godard included) more or less close to the magazine itself. (However, it seems that MEDITERRANNEE, hitherto the *cheval de bataille* in the fight for a materialist cinema, has now fallen into disgrace).

Whether the difficulties facing the reader when confronted with *Cinéthique's* remorselessly theoretical articles are due to the new ground which it claims to be breaking, or to a penchant for a style of writing that tends to be bluntly assertive and wildly generalising where one would like it to be analytical, and perversely limiting in its terminology where the avowed intention is to be precise, is probably a point worth arguing in a British context, but not necessarily decisive in France, where the discursive methods of empiricism are not universally regarded as superior. In view of this, neither the intricate verbal tracery which often seems to shroud fairly simple propositions in *Cinéthique* (apparently *de rigeur* if one claims to be scientific), nor the high pitch of a language pressed into service in order to give vent to a constantly more irritated dogmatism should obscure the fact that the magazine is trying to make a serious contribution to the understanding of the cinema (though, it must be said, very little to that of individual films)—even if their (curiously unhistorical) idea that the cinema is to be entirely remade, turned inside out and upside down, so as to shake off its bourgeois odium, is scarcely appealing in its grim puritanism to anyone who actually likes watching films.

In view of the fact that *Cinéthique* has with their current issue (No. 9/10) inaugurated what amounts to its third change of course (accompanied, this time, by an autocritique of sorts) the question poses itself if the magazine has given itself in its theoretical premisses enough margin to operate flexibly and yet coherently. With virtually no actual films to discuss, and its general critique of the cinema now mapped out, it seems to be heading fast towards its own vanishing point. Yet this possibility shows more clearly than one might have wished, that *Cinéthique* has always been struggling with an unresolved dilemma. On the one hand, it wants to flesh out Althusser's immensely complex model of the working of bourgeois society by elucidating one aspect of it: bourgeois ideology, subdivision cinema. On the other hand, there is a noticeable pull towards applying to the whole semiological-structuralist logomachia the razor of practical politics—with the cinema simply treated as a tactical weapon in the class-struggle, and enlisted unequivocally on the side of the proletariat. This latter tendency is especially evident in the articles of the editor, Gérard Leblanc, whose ideas on art and culture have the authentic ring of the Zdanovite.

If the two tendencies—the elucidatory neoMarxist and the moralizing 'proletarian'—are occasionally at odds, they find their common denominator in the overall strategy of developing a 'materialist' critique and practice of the cinema. What does this mean? Basically two things: a new way of making films, and a different attitude when looking at them. In order for the audience to become conscious of the materialist nature of the cinematic experience, and thus in order to understand the cinema 'correctly'—so the argument goes—it must learn (or be taught) to consider a film first and foremost (*Cinéthique* phase I: exclusively) as a 'product'—of labour (both intellectual and manual) and of dialectically operating economic and ideological forces (what kind of projects are being financed, what films fail to get distribution, and why). This a-priori is scarcely a self-sufficient critical statement (though some of the early articles gave rise to such a misunderstanding, especially where they seemed to insist that a film is only worth looking at if it includes shots of the technicians and a detailed rundown on financing and costs), but should perhaps more modestly be taken as the starting point for a critical-analytic model, focussing less on artistic 'consciousness' and more on artistic 'production'. The proposition indicates well enough the drift in *Cinéthique's* critical inquiry: to define some of the concepts considered relevant and necessary for building (the theory of?) a materialist cinema. These are basically drawn from the somewhat dated vocabulary of econo-

mism, though enriched with such Althusserian notions as that of 'rupture' (see in this respect the editorial "Direction" in No. 5). Any other concept of film-criticism, in particular the model which suggests that a film is the 'creation' of an 'auteur', who is giving 'expression' to a 'vision of the world' which is 'realized' through a 'personal style' is anathema to *Cinéthique*, because seen as the threadbare and bankrupt mystification of a film's real (i.e. economic) raison d'être. The chief enemy is the idealist heritage of cinema criticism and of culture in general (in fact we are witnessing a manichean struggle: "la guerre mortelle entre le matérialisme et l'idéalisme"—No. 5 p.20), which is identified with the rule of the bourgeoisie and the exploitation of the proletariat.

"How does the bourgeoisie abstract [a film] from its conditions of production and distribution? By classifying it in terms of leisure ("film for the family") or of culture ("art-film"). Films aren't made in order to invest capital at a high profit rate (and to reinvest these profits, obtained by the economic exploitation of technicians, directors, etc., in other films), but rather for some supposedly humanitarian aim: to move, to entertain, to promote culture. [. . .] How is this commodity sold? The methods differ according to the market. If the product is geared to the masses ("general release") one sticks on the label "star". If the film is aimed at an élite, the label is "auteur". Sometimes both labels are combined, as when a well-known director uses popular stars. Truffaut + Belmondo + Deneuve = "La Sirene du Mississippi" (No. 5 p.4/5). With an analysis as superficial as this, one fears the worst for the proposed remedy. What is to be done, according to *Cinéthique*? The proletarian film-maker will produce films which are unclassifiable, films which refuse either to entertain or to 'say' anything, but instead have as a primary aim to exacerbate, alienate and irritate the spectator. ("Le piège que la bourgeoisie tend au cinéma: masquer son travail en imposant un sens à ce qu'il montre"—No. 5 p.36). This refusal to make films with which the spectator might identify—on any level, emotional or intellectual—indicates the point of rupture, and the beginning of a materialist cinema. There is an article entitled "Godard—exchange value or value for use" (No. 5 p.22), in which UN FILM COMME LES AUTRES is explained as a *film de rupture* because it represents a deliberate effort on the part of its director to depreciate the 'market value' of his name among bourgeois intellectuals. On another occasion, Godard is praised for having, in ONE PLUS ONE, bungled certain sequences in order to prevent the producer from making any money on the film (No. 6 p.42). Whatever one may think about Godard's latest films, it seems obvious that their effect, their æsthetic principles are in no way adequately elucidated by a single reference to their economic or anti-economic motivation. Just as with Truffaut's SIRENE, *Cinéthique's* remarks, even if true, leave all the more worthwhile questions unanswered. The sad fact is that faced with a specific film, *Cinéthique* has nothing to say.

By contrast, the desire to analyse the cinema 'in general' as an integral part of an ideological nexus, i.e. as a system of practices—social, economic, artistic—which are inter-related and determining each other in varying degrees, is promising, if only because it proposes "a critique of the [linguistic] imprecisions which [the cinema's] ideological situation propagates" (No. 5 p15). As a meta-critique of bourgeois criticism (in line with what Gozlin did to Bazin's critical terminology) it might usefully interpret some of the notions and values which sustain 'popular' cinematic taste (or 'highbrow' for that matter). This of course, would be a perfectly orthodox (in France, at any rate) sociological study. However, *Cinéthique* wants to go further. It would claim, for instance, that the distorted picture given of power-politics in the James Bond films, or the stultifying use made of such relative and spuriously evaluative criteria as "entertainment", serving (together with its opposite "thought-provoking") as the normative grid of a certain type of journalistic criticism, is not simply a regrettable sign of creative or critical impotence, but part of a self-perpetuating system in which a certain class stands to gain by manipulating bogus value and constructing false antitheses.

There is some undeniable truth to this, and the relation between, on the one hand, what a person enjoys or likes, and his critical awareness of reality or his actual social or psychological needs on the other, is a moot point, but as liberals (and some Marxists) never tire to point out, assuming that bourgeois culture may be a form of enforced alienation, it seems equally perverse to claim that, say, a work of art should be definable by the sum of its economic and ideological antecedents, from which alone it is supposed to derive value and significance. An extreme example of this kind of reductionism can be found in an article on CITIZEN KANE (No. 6 p.27—again signed by Gérard Leblanc) which manages the amazing equation Welles + Randolph Hearst + RKO = CITIZEN KANE = Nazism = Bazin.

Central to the magazine's concerns is the question of how the cinema functions by displacing social and psychological conflicts, and thus prevents a *prise de conscience* on the part of the spectator. The editorial in No. 5 has some harsh words to say about petit-bourgeois, individualist films that take a subjective stance on social and political problems, and the American as well as the American-influenced underground is summarily dismissed for having become a successful part of the 'youth-cult' industry band-wagon. There is a strict embargo on nudity, drugs, violence, emotion, suspense, drama, hero—which makes the logic of *Cinéthique's* aversion to virtually the entire body of existing films at least consistent, if no more convincing. The argument is a familiar one: any form of 'action' is considered instrumental in perpetuating the social and moral order of the bourgeoisie by providing substitute gratifications for the frustrations accumulated in ordinary life, and thus reinforces social and individual alienation, without pointing a way towards living out one's desires or satisfying one's needs in reality.

"In fact, it is in the interest of the bourgeoisie that the spectator should find compensations in the cinema. These compensations can be of a sexual, political, sentimental or metaphysical nature (there is one needed for all the alienations engendered by capitalism). By a kind of tacit vote, the spectator delegates his own powers to the characters on the screen who transform the world in his place. The famous window which the bourgeois cinema opens onto the world always reduces itself to giving the spectator the illusion of living his imaginary life by projecting it into a reality which doesn't exist" (No. 5 p.3). Such a line of inquiry has severe limitations. The fact that 'the cinema' is globally condemned for being escapist leaves no room for differentiations of any kind. Films are either good or bad, according to whether they are deemed bourgeois or not—and one wonders why *Cinéthique* bothers with an elaborate theory if in the final count, the matter is that simple?

There is, somewhere in its pages, the grudging admission that such a thing as a good 'idealist' film is possible, but the examples are disappointingly conservative (only European 'art' directors, with the metaphysical Bresson and Dreyer heading the list) and nothing more specific is said about them. Granted that *Cinéthique's* arguments are true regarding all the films that are bad anyway (and who would want to deny that 90 per cent of the world's film-production today is a waste of time?), this position doesn't allow itself to tell us anything worth knowing about those films which are, from an æsthetic or historical point of view, important. In a sense, *Cinéthique's* a-priori political commitment (the 'proletarian' orthodox line) permits it to eschew one major difficulty of 'political' cinema by ignoring it: æsthetics just aren't admitted as a valid epistemological category. The magazine's sociological generalizations are based on an atrophied idea of the nature and potential of art, seen as something simply to be annexed to political science, as a branch of socio-pathology.

The result is that *Cinéthique's* perspective can seem only plausible because resting on a kind of double error that perhaps cancels itself out: on the one hand, it overestimates the cinema's real, but limited capacity for obscuring, through displacement, psychic or social conflicts (as opposed to structuring an experience of reality in such a way as to 'free' psychic energy—one of the possible functions of a film that possesses æsthetic qualities) and secondly, it grossly underestimates the potential of 'idealist' (i.e. narrative-dramatic) cinema to generate a differentiated emotional response, and to represent moral and intellectual complexity in a concrete social or political situation (without thereby prevaricating over metaphysical ambiguities). Even within the politically committed cinema: one thinks of Rosi's SALVATORE GIULIANO or Guerra's OZ FUZIS (to give just two examples)—films which communicate through a narrative-dramatic framework of great subtlety the circumstances and growth of a political consciousness. *Cinéthique's* schematic approach to the question of 'escapism' precludes it from analyzing coherently the kinds of empathy or distancing effects that can be found in such films. The important question is to ask what the precise ends are to which these effects and techniques are being used. (In order to 'alienate' an audience, Brecht once said, you must never forget first to create the fiction to alienate it from). Instead, Gérard Leblanc lays down the law: "Disons-le avec force: tous les films qui font vivre au spectateur des émotions etrangères au cinéma sont bourgeois" (No. 5 p36).

The way some of the contributors to *Cinéthique* are trying to avoid the more obvious pitfalls of Leblanc's rigorism (what are, one is prompted to ask, properly cinematic emotions?), is to operate a kind of two-tier analysis of ideological elements in a film. There is, for instance, a tentative effort (and in the context of *Cinéthique's* general line almost subversive) in an article by Jean-Paul Fargier, one of the more lucid minds on the magazine, to establish æsthetics as a category distinct from ideology. Fargier quotes approvingly (he has since recanted—see No. 9/10) from a piece by Alain Badiou entitled 'autonomy of the æsthetic process'. The passage runs as follows: "Art isn't ideology. It is altogether impossible to explain it by a homological rapport with historical reality. The aesthetic process refocusses the mirror-relation in which ideology perpetuates its closed infinity. The æsthetic effect is indeed imaginary; but this imaginary [world] isn't the reflection of reality, but the reality of this reflection. Neither is art scientific. The æsthetic effect is not a cognitive effect. However, in so far as art is the realization and the differentiating denunciation of its own ideology, it is structurally closer to science than to ideology. It produces the imaginary reality of that which science appropriates as the real reality" (No. 6 p.50).

This somewhat inelegant passage states in Marxist terminology (the model is Goldmann's 'genetic structuralism') what has been a central theme of European æsthetic thought since the Romantics: that there is a cognitive dimension to art—a discovery which broke with the Aristotelian notion of art as mimesis. Symbolism, surrealism, Bachelard's phenomenological psychology (i.e. some of the most formative influences on modern French criticism) are unthinkable without this premiss of the autonomy of the æsthetic phenomenon. For any æsthetics of the cinema, this of course creates some obvious difficulties, since the cinema is nothing if not mimetic. It automatically suggests a homological relationship with the reality it depicts. *Cinéthique* is caught in this dilemma: it seems to want to base its anti-naturalistic theory of revolutionary cinema on the anti-mimetic, anti-Aristotelian current in modern æsthetic thought, but on the other hand, for political-ideological reasons, the major justification of this thought, namely æsthetic autonomy, is unacceptable.

What Fargier therefore does in his article, called "Parenthesis and Detour—essay in the theoretical definition of the rapport between cinema and politics", is to make a distinction between what he sees to be the cinema's twofold relation

to ideology: It *reproduces,* on a primary level, already existing ideologies (propagated in subject and story, stereotyped characters and dramatic situations, milieu, genre, etc.), which a 'left-wing' filmmaker can avoid. But it also *produces* its own specific ideology. Thus, even a film with a critical intention or a left-wing subject offers little resistance against being absorbed by the bourgeoisie into its own system of values, and therefore being transformed into a commodity destined for consumption (what *Cinéthique* calls the *cinéma-spectacle* syndrome), so long as it stays within the dramatic-narrative sequential framework taken over from naturalist drama and realist novels. (Pontecorvo's BATTLE OF ALGIERS suggests itself as an obvious candidate).

In order to prove this, *Cinéthique* has published an article (further ones were promised) which bases itself on the work of semiologists at the Ecole Pratique (Metz, Todorov, Bremond) who have analyzed the rhetoric of narrative genres, by isolating recurrent units which organize a narrative structure. The article in question is called "the figures of conditioning" (No. 5 p.41), and it deals with the rhetorical elements used in the cinema to construct dramatic situations in such a way as to persuade an audience that these conflicts are 'true to life'. But whereas the semiologists have contented themselves with showing that disjunction, pleonasm, inversion, tautology, etc. are pervasive figures which in various disguises or modifications structure the 'codes' of most artistic and communication media, reflecting thus a fairly homogeneous mode by which Western thinking apprehends and seeks to reproduce reality, *Cinéthique* seems to want to argue not only that this is typically bourgeois, but also that it has a specific relevance to the cinema, because the latter utilizes a directly naturalist non-symbolic language. Fargier's contention, therefore, is that there is a second-level ideological slant, embodied in the syntactical and optical mechanisms specific to the cinema, which are 'naturally' favourable to conveying a bourgeois picture of the world.

The burden of the argument rests on the assumption that the cinema is idealist and thus mystificatory precisely because of its treacherous mimesis, its ability to produce an impression of reality. (The force of the argument is considerably blunted, however, by Fargier's occasional use of the terms 'ideological' and 'bourgeois' as interchangeable. He has to admit that the idealist cinema practiced in socialist countries is favourable to a proletarian ideology, and therefore of 'tactical' value. Does this mean that only a decadent bourgeois society needs a materialist cinema?)

From this impression of reality (which most critics would regard as the cinema's chief asset and primary claim to æsthetic consideration) Fargier wants to tie the rope with which to hang it: since a film endeavours to persuade us that what is shown is part of a seamless, self-contained totality, it makes us victims of an optical illusion by disguising the procedures, the labour, the multiple techniques and resources that have gone into producing this effect of totality, thus pretending to give us reality directly, and not just a concoction of sound and images ("même le film le plus révolutionnaire ne peut donner que ce qu'il a: des images et des sons"—No. 5 p.36). At the same time, it makes us victims of an ideology, because what characterizes an ideology is precisely that it is a body of ideas, beliefs, conventions, verbal and visual icons which are instantly recognized and accepted by a certain society or social class as true and self-evident.

Now, the inference which Fargier draws is that the 'truth' of the cinema, its illusion of reality, which on the technical level is so manifestly 'constructed' and manipulated in view of certain ends (be they 'naïvely' in order to engage the spectator emotionally in the fate of the characters, and to allow him to follow the development of a story visually, or 'politically' as propaganda, and deliberate falsification) is analogous to the processes which condition us in social life to accept certain states of affairs, and especially the economic rapport between social classes as natural, immutable, etc. In other words, both cinema and bourgeois ideology militate actively for the *status quo.* The mechanism (natural or culturally induced) which governs our 'decoding' of filmic language into comprehensible information and allows us to recognize and subsequently identify with an image on the screen (or series of images), because felt as 'true', is the same that operates in ordinary life and prevents an understanding of the actual contradictions in society by presenting at all levels a spurious coherence. Cinematic logic and bourgeois logic share the same unilinear goal-orientated 'discourse', disguising the dialectical nature of social reality instead of revealing it.

Furthermore, *Cinéthique* argues (echoing the Cubists, Max Ernst and the surrealists when they championed non-representative art), that the optical construction of the camera gives a 'monocular' view of the world, that is, it assumes automatically the position of the single point of view, exclusive, voyeuristic, and inherited from perspectival painting of the Renaissance. Metz, in an interview (No. 6 p.22) points out that the argument about the camera's 'optical castration' is in fact yet another form of the Bazin-Eisenstein controversy about the relative merits of *plan-sequence* and out-and-out montage. From the position of *Cinéthique,* what is wrong with the *plan-sequence* is its 'naturalist' perspective that suggests an objective order within which events take place, and thus stabilizes the spectator's perception to a point where he assumes comfortably and unquestionably a position of contemplation or vicarious empathy. He will be able to recognize himself on the screen and thus, by *Cinéthique's* reasoning, **not** recognize himself in actual life. By contrast, a non-illusionist 'materialist' film because not fabricating a coherent fiction, would transform the æsthetic experience of watching a film into a participatory act, in which "there is work on the part of the spectator—decipherment, and a reading of the traces produced by the work of the film [on its material]" (No. 5 p21).

Cinéthique thus argues for a wholly self-conscious cinema, concerned only with itself and the fact of its own existence as a form of visual reproduction — a meta-cinema, in other words, consisting of filmic essays answering to the question "what is the cinema?" "what is a film?" Since a film in bourgeois society cannot say anything about the world without falling victim to one or the other form of 'idealist' ideology, its only valid role in social reality is on the level of 'theoretical practice', a niche which *Cinéthique* has yet to fill with a precise meaning. This general position, of course, parallels in some ways that of a certain avant-garde literature—Joyce, Becket, nouveau roman—where the object of literature is not 'the world', but language itself, in what hides or reveals itself through its structure and articulation.

What distinguishes *Cinéthique* (and *Tel Quel*) from this current of modernist aestheticism is the insistence on the Marxist-revolutionary (in *Cinéthique's* case proletarian-Marxist) pretentions of their efforts, for whose justifications no intellectual argument is too convoluted. *Cinéthique's* main contribution is that it has drawn attention to the fact that there are several ideologically interpretable dimensions to a film: its subject matter, its syntactical construction, its status as product of an industry. The attempts to relate and analytically describe these various dimensions within one critical theory and to derive from this theory a practical model of how to make films is as ambitious as it seems basically unsuccessful and unconvincing—if not altogether misconceived.

For the reproaches which are levelled against the narrative cinema —namely that it is idealist by disguising its own cinematic nature, by 'naïvely' giving the reflection of a (possibly false) reality, instead of giving the filmic reality of a political reflection, and by propagating a monocular, and hence individualist-subjective point of view—are simply not borne out by the evidence. They are based on an error of judgement which on the theoretical level is due to an inability to discuss the properly æsthetic component of a film, and practically the result of a total ignorance of the cinema's history. No film of Lang, Renoir, Murnau, Hitchcock, Bunuel, Godard, or Rivette (to mention only a few) masks its own genesis or passes itself off as the direct, unreflected reproduction of reality. Renoir's LA NUIT DU CARREFOUR, made in 1932, is more modern in this respect than many a *film de rupture* produced today: it is precisely what *Cinéthique* demands of a film: it plays with its own fiction troubling in more than one way the mirror image which bourgeois ideology is supposed to give of bourgeois social reality. And yet, Renoir's film is naturalist, dramatic and linear, with its various levels of 'discourse' perfectly articulated by a complex modulation of mood, emphasis and visual rhythm.

The value of a critical system must be judged by the amount of work it can do: that is, by its ability to evaluate and differentiate consistently within a given framework. *Cinéthique's* wholesale condemnation of the narrative cinema is in one respect its strong point—it permits it to live in some cinematic utopia, having staked its claims in an area where only the advent of Revolution itself could seriously challenge it. As a critical method for examining existing films, its analystic tools are virtually useless. So long as it cannot accommodate more positively the æsthetic qualities of a film (and that means a close evaluation of the given historical context), it is not practising film-criticism, but some form of semiological luddditism, which proves in the last instance little that is decisive about the actual ideological significance or the future potential of the narrative 'illusionist' cinema. There is between attempting to understand the 'code' which constitutes the narrative form on its most generalized level, and the demand that this code be altered, a gap which cannot be bridged by a theoretical argument of the type proposed.

The economic and political ills affecting the modern film-industry are too obvious to merit an elaborate theory. They cannot be cured by 'anti-films' practising minimalist protests, ideological rupture, or by deliberately bungled takes. If a battle is to be fought with the way the industry is presently organized (one of *Cinéthique's* original aims) *Cinéthique* has moved further and further away from the front-lines. If it is, however, a question of alternative critical models, emphasizing the various 'significant' axes that run from the product to the society which surrounds it (and of which the director's intention or vision may only be one), then *Cinéthique's* revolutionary - prescriptive pretensions do not stand it in good stead. "Art", Trotsky has pointed out, "is far less capable than science of anticipating the future. Such prescriptions as 'pave the road to socialism' give little more to the creative imagination than the price-list of a hardware shop or a railway timetable". *Cinéthique* is doing prodigious work on this timetable. But with its wilful ignorance about the creative imagination, it may well be that it has boarded a train without an engine. And one wonders just how much theoretical practice is needed to put such a train in motion.

Thomas Elsaesser

Cinéthique *is available from 2 rue Théophraste Renandot Paris 15e.*

OS FUZIS

BOOK REVIEWS

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

José Luis Guarner, Studio Vista, London, 1970, 70p.

Britain has treated Roberto Rossellini with the characteristically philistine combination of neglect and mindless theft which appears to be its hallmark in the contemporary epoch, at least as far as the cinema is concerned. I therefore welcome Guarner's book, while at the same time insisting on a hard criticism of it.

The welcome and the critique are needed simultaneously, for exactly the same reasons. In the first place, the particular combination of neglect and theft which has been Rossellini's fate in Britain necessitates a rather careful situating of any work on him. His large cinematic œuvre is only spasmodically available. Nothing can substitute for a rigorous viewing of Rossellini's films. I think it must be assumed (explicitly) that virtually no one in Britain has seen Rossellini's early films, made while the Fascist régime was still in power: from innumerable interviews and articles referring to ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA as "Rossellini's first films", this would seem an unavoidable assumption. But not only have most people in Britain not seen Rossellini's first, fascist films, they do not even know they exist. Rossellini's career, and indeed the whole concept of 'neo-realism' are, in effect, unknown in England.

An ignorance of the founding moment of a director's career in the cinema can only lead to some kind of aberrant perspective; Guarner's book makes no more than a gesture in this direction since he devotes a mere half-dozen pages to Rossellini's fascist films. There is no attempt to go into the historical origins of 'neo-realism' or, equally important, to try to analyse the transition from Rossellini's fascist films to his post-fascist films. Since 'neo-realism' is, at least in popular mythology, thought to be by definition a left-wing mode of film-making, these two lacunæ must be criticized, since they undermine what I take to be Guarner's project—a book on the films of Rossellini.

Recently, a considerable amount of work has been done abroad (mainly in Italy) on the origins of 'neo-realism' and the findings of this research should soon be made available in England. The main point to be made at once is that all existing attempts to establish some kind of decisive break at 1943 (the fall of Mussolini) are more or less unscientific and usually voluntarist and/or apologetic. What did change in 1943 (in Central and Southern Italy) was the purely political régime, but claims for a completely 'new' Italian cinema, miraculously emerging out of nowhere, must be rejected.

A full development of this necessary task would involve two components: detailed work on Italian cinema culture prior to 1943 and rigorous qualification of the alleged novelty of post-1943 work.

It is well known that Italy had a much richer fascist culture than Germany: several world-famous figures like D'Annunzio, Marinetti and Pirandello supported fascism in their individual ways, and one of Italy's leading philosophers, Giovanni Gentile, lent his prestige to covering the régime on the front of ideas. Italy was also able to offer a much freer cultural atmosphere than Nazi Germany, and after Hitler's advent to power two of Germany's most notable film personalities emigrated to Italy: Walter Ruttmann and Max Ophüls (the latter via the Soviet Union, where he made a brief and unsuccessful halt). A year later Ophüls had produced perhaps his greatest work, LA SIGNORA DI TUTTI, in Italy. Ruttmann, surprisingly for a former prominent member of the German left, went to work with Pirandello on a film entitled ACCIAIO (*Steel*, 1933), much derived from Verga, particularly the CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA. Italian critics who have seen ACCIAIO have indicated it as a fundamental date in Italian cinema history, and in the history of 'neo-realism'. The combination of talent in itself deserves attention: on the one hand Pirandello, on the other hand, Ruttmann, the director of BERLIN, DIE SYMPHONIE EINER GROSSSTADT, soon to return to Nazi Germany and direct a number of documentaries on steel production for the big armaments companies and, finally, war documentaries. Apart from anything else, it would be interesting to compare Rossellini's L'ETA DEL FERRO with ACCIAIO and Ruttman's German steel films.

Italian fascism also left a good deal more room for manœuvre to younger writers and thinkers than did German fascism, and this latitude was particularly marked in the cinema. It happened that one of Mussolini's sons was particularly keen on the movies, and took an active part not only as producer but also in editing and covering the film review, *Cinema*. *Cinema* became the focus of activity for a whole group of young cinephiles, most of whom only became well known after the fall of Mussolini. Apart from Vittorio Mussolini, the Duce's son, the group included Roberto Rossellini, Luigi Chiarini, Carlo Lizzani, Gianni Puccini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Umberto Barbaro. The connections at the time were

rather closer than may now be remembered: for example, Gentile wrote the introduction to Chiarini's book, *Cinematografo* in 1935; Vittorio Mussolini was the producer of Rossellini's UN PILOTA RITORNA (1942), on which Antonioni shared the script credit. The destinies of the members of the group were remarkable: Rossellini and Antonioni becoming major directors, Lizzani and Puccini minor ones; Chiarini theoretician and organizer of the Venice Film Festival; and Barbaro, already an established theoretician and thinker at the time of *Cinema*, surviving to become one of the two leading Marxist theoreticians of film in Italy (and perhaps the world), along with Galvano della Volpe.

The term 'neo-realism' appears to have been coined by Barbaro himself, but—so far as I know—has never received a precise definition or area of application. It is notable (something not dealt with by Guarner) that Rossellini rejects the usual facile method of using the term to cover post-ROMA, CITTA APERTA work, and **explicitly** dates the movement covered by the term 'neo-realism' (which he **implicitly** rejects) back several years, at least to films of the vintage of LA NAVE BIANCA (1941). Moreover, he also refuses to accept the idea that there is any cæsura in his own work: "From my documentaries, to my first war films, my post-war films and on up to my pictures of today, there is only one, single line, although, of course, I have been seeking out different things at different times. No one could deny, for example, that there is one and the same spirituality (*spiritualità*) in NAVE BIANCA and in UOMO DELLA CROCE, in PAISA and in FRANCESCO, GIULLARE DI DIO, in the short episode, IL MIRACOLO and in the end of STROMBOLI". The very first characteristic of his own films, what he calls *coralità* (chorality), Rossellini sees as a continuing feature. "The realist (*realistico*) film is, in itself, choral. The sailors in NAVE BIANCA count just as much as the people sheltering in the hut at the end of UOMO DELLA CROCE, just as much as the population in ROME, OPEN CITY, just as much as the partisans in PAISA and the friars in FRANCESCO".[1]

Rossellini, of course, is absolutely correct: there is no break between his fascist films and his post-fascist films. The difference between ROMA, CITTA APERTA and, say, L'UOMO DELLA CROCE is one of content (and, to a lesser extent, of cast)—there is no 'stylistic' break whatsoever; furthermore, there is no radical modification of the basic feature, which directors as different as Rossellini and Pasolini have identified as the No. 1 aspect, "the way of looking at the world". Rossellini looks with equal favour on the Catholic priest working as chaplain to a fascist army invading the Soviet Union (and attempting to convert the local inhabitants to a profoundly reactionary viewpoint) and on a Catholic priest helping the Resistance in Italy against the Nazis (L'UOMO DELLA CROCE and ROMA, CITTA APERTA). This, I must add, is not the same gift as being able to see, and present, both sides of a problem.

I think the ignorance of the pre-ROMA, CITTA APERTA period of Rossellini's work has had a number of grave effects, tantamount to those which a biographer might encounter trying to write an analytic history of someone's life with no knowledge of events before the person in question had reached the age of 15. A re-reading now of the articles in *Sequence* devoted to the films of Rossellini and the 'neo-realists' reveals clearly the **impossibility** of the critical position adopted at the time (a melange of insights, genuine appreciation and aberrant ignorance and omission). This defective 'reading' of Rossellini, based on defective viewing then subsequently translated itself into further aberrant criticism (the successive rejection of several of Rossellini's greatest works), which in turn contributed to a refusal even to screen many of Rossellini's films. But Rossellini, more than any other director I can think of, needs to have his work viewed as a whole, and in chronological order, and this absence of his films has made it simply impossible to assess his work, creating a vicious circle of rejection-absence-ignorance-incomprehension-rejection-absence . . . It has, of course, also led to an uncritical integration of what some British directors presumably thought to be the essential ingredients of 'neo-realism'. The inanity of those who thought that a worthless ham like Fellini had anything in common with a master like Rossellini, or who were stupid enough to commit themselves in writing to the ludicrously untenable position that De Sica was a better director than Rossellini, has since become part of the burdensome heritage of British cinema from John Schlesinger through Karel Reisz to Lindsay Anderson *et al.*

As the most perceptive of the *Sequence* group, Lindsay Anderson seems to have been the first to wake up to the fact that he had stumbled across rather more than he could digest: by the winter of 1947 he was already expressing his doubts about PAISA (in a highly confused manner).[2] Six issues later *Sequence* was publishing an incredibly violent and subjective attack on GERMANIA, ANNO ZERO towards the "facile improvisation and sketchiness" of which Lotte Eisner was deciding, with all the blindness of hindsight, that PAISA was the first step down the slippery slope.[3] After printing an even more absurd attack on GERMANIA in issue 10, *Sequence* signed off on 'neo-realism' with a brief uncomprehending note on THE MIRACLE by Anderson in Number 11.[4]

In effect, Rossellini was treated by *Sequence* as a fad, rather than as a force. Knowing apparently nothing of his origins, they were able to write him off in a completely a-historical way, elevating prejudice to the level of a critical criterion. Rossellini, like many intelligent and inventive directors, has certainly made a number of 'turns' in his career, but each time a 'turning-point' has caused admirers to reject him (as, for example, after GERMANIA, VOYAGE TO ITALY or IL GENERALE DELLA ROVERE) he has come up with another extremely new masterpiece: FRANCESCO, GIULLARE DI DIO, VIVA L'ITALIA! and LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV are certainly among his greatest works (and, en passant, far superior to ROMA, CITTA APERTA).

In Italy, Rossellini has had rather a different critical career. Interestingly, he was ignored at first in the immediate post-war period by the then cultural vanguard of the Marxist left, *Il politecnico*, edited by Vittorini. ROMA, CITTA APERTA was not reviewed in *Il politecnico* at the time of its appearance.[5] Rossellini, in spite of ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA, was seen as a politically ambiguous director. He was alleged

to support the Christian Democrat Party, the ruling organization in Italy, highly clerical and anti-Communist and bent on burying the revolutionary impetus that had emerged during the Resistance.

But Rossellini was already light-years ahead of his critics, as was later to be recognized by, among others, Jean-Luc Godard, whose phrase Guarner prints in his Postscript: "Where others will only be arriving in maybe twenty years, he has already been".

From Italy, Rossellini moved to Germany. Rossellini has repeatedly mentioned his abiding interest, and concern with Germany. Like Visconti (SENSO[6], VAGHE STELLE DELL'ORSA, THE DAMNED, DEATH IN VENICE), Rossellini is intrigued with Germany, and with Germany's relationship with Italy, which figures in a succession of films: ROMA, CITTA APERTA and PAISA (the German occupation of Italy, and the Italians' attempts to liberate themselves), GERMANIA, ANNO ZERO (the 'new' Germany: is it really new?), STROMBOLI (the aftermath of the German devastation of Europe), LA PAURA, ERA NOTTE A ROMA (the German occupation of Italy, again) and ANIMA NERA (whose 'hero' bears the scars of a homosexual experience with a Nazi officer during the occupation). Far from seeming "improvised and sketchy" as Lotte Eisner would have it, GERMANIA now, over twenty years later, still stands as probably the best film on post-war Germany ever made. One of the reasons for this is Rossellini's ability to be prepared to try and seize history at its most unlikely moments: few directors thought Germany was even interesting at the time, from the inside.

It would have been good to see a more extended attempt to assess Rossellini's attitude to history. Guarner makes a few rather elliptic allusions (for example, in discussing ERA NOTTE A ROMA), but he does not come to grips with Rossellini's complex and profoundly successful cinematic approach to history—best exemplified in VIVA L'ITALIA! and LOUIS XIV. There seem to be some theses there, particularly on VIVA L'ITALIA! and VANINA VANINI, but they do not emerge very clearly—and they are vitiated by an unworthy comparison with Visconti's SENSO, which is slandered in a quite unjustifiable way.

For those who wish to make use of Guarner's book for studying Rossellini, I would like to make a few more detailed criticisms. Guarner describes Rossellini's three fascist films (LA NAVE BIANCA, UN PILOTA RITORNA and L'UOMO DELLA CROCE) as "the least consistent and most debatable part of Rossellini's work" (p.11): this is in no way argued, and seems to me quite gratuitous. On the contrary, these works seem to be quite consistent with Rossellini's later work (by his own account as well as by mine. Discussing ROMA, CITTA APERTA a few pages later (p.13), Guarner calls it "the most melodramatic of neo-realist films": absolutely correct. So-called 'neo-realism' was incredibly melodramatic, in the conventional sense of the term. So were the fascist films: of LA NAVE BIANCA, Guarner writes: "The natural quality is sacrificed to rhetoric . . . and everything is bathed in slushy music. This sentimentality nullifies the simple and direct aspects of the next scene . . ." (p.8). But rhetoric and sentimentality are two of the key elements of 'neo-realism', and they do need discussing, and the connections examined. (Parenthetically, I think the claim that the music for LA NAVE BIANCA is "inconsistent" needs arguing, as it is by Renzo Rossellini, and presumably had Roberto Rossellini's approval).

I would also query Guarner's analytic categories at some points: for example, discussing LA LOTTA DELL' UOMO PER LA SUA SOPRAVVIVENZA (p.118), he writes: "As in the banquet scene in LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV, the importance of the camera-movement is not æsthetic, but moral: it seeks to apprise us of a political fact". "Moral" (whatever it may mean) can have nothing to do with "political". To apprise viewers of a political fact is not "moral" in any sense I could ascribe to the word, and as a critical statement seems to me to undermine Rossellini's **highly political** approach to picture-making.

This confusion between morals and politics runs through much of the book. Early on (p.10), Guarner writes that both UN PILOTA RITORNA and L'UOMO DELLA CROCE "are built on the common theme of liberty, which later becomes one of the fundamental themes of Rossellini's work". But how can L'UOMO DELLA CROCE be "built on the theme of liberty?"

It would also have been good to have seen several points expanded (although I appreciate the space limitations): among these would be the relationship between Vidor and Rossellini (p.6), given that Rossellini acknowledges that seeing early Vidors like THE CROWD and HALLELLUJAH! was important in stimulating him to go into films (and there are obvious parallels between the works of the two directors); the relationship between Rossellini and De Robertis (pp.6-7) and the whole set-up at the time including the role of Vittorio Mussolini (p.10); Rossellini's vision of the importance of actors like Magnani and Fabrizi in the earlier post-1943 films; what happened, in more detail, to the sizeable number of films which Rossellini did not manage to complete as he wished, for various reasons: DESIDERIO (p.13), LA MACCHINA AMMAZZACATTIVI (p.38), DOV'E LA LIBERTA? (pp.56-7), ANGST/LA PAURA (p.73), VANINA VANINI (p.100); Rossellini's relationship with the Italian left-wing intelligentsia—and particularly with the Italian Communist Party, given that one of its prominent intellectuals, Antonello Trombardori co-authored the original (rejected) treatment on VANINA VANINI, and that Galvano Della Volpe, the leader of the anti-romantic, anti-idealist wing of contemporary Italian Marxism sat on the board of *Filmcritica* alongside Rossellini (if, say, *mutatis mutandis*, Lindsay Anderson and A. J. Ayer sat on a film magazine together, this is something that should be taken into account). Lastly, Italian phrases should be translated: this goes both for film titles, like LA MACCHINA AMMAZZACATTIVI (THE CAMERA THAT KILLS BAD PEOPLE)[7], and for phrases in the text like the slogan 'Chi si ferma è perduto' ('Anyone who stops is lost') or the long end-title on L'UOMO DELLA CROCE (p.10).[8]

Guarner's book has some good sections, such as that on the little-appreciated and even less seen ILLIBATEZZA (pp.103-5), the Rossellini contribution to ROGOPAG. I very much hope that the appearance of a book on Rossellini in English will both stimulate a

reviewing of his work, if possible *in toto*; but because of Rossellini's towering importance in the history of the cinema, and his innumerable contributions both seen and unseen, both the book and his films must be 'read' with a critical, attentive and informed mind. Those who love Rossellini's work must face up to his sentimentalism; those who admit his political audacity must face up to his populism; and the many who have taken from Rossellini without understanding what he was all about and unloaded his great discoveries into the kitchen sink must be attacked.

JON HALLIDAY

NOTES

1. 'Colloquio sul neorealismo' (interview with Rossellini by Mario Verdone, *Bianco e Nero*, February 1952. The original of the phrase between asterisks is "pur attraverso le differenti ricerche", which could also be translated as something like "although, of course, I was trying to do different things at different times" (or it could, less probably, refer to technique).

2. *Sequence* 2 (Winter 1947). PAISA was first shown in Britain at the Edinburgh Festival of Documentary. One may notice that the English translation of the title at the time was "Ordinary People"!

3. Lotte H. Eisner, 'Notes on Some Recent Italian Films', *Sequence* (Summer 1949): 52-58. "We must, I think, revise a number of opinions that have been formed rather prematurely about the Italian cinema: too much importance has been attached to Rossellini, too little acknowledgment has been given to Vergano and de Sica" (p.52). "In relating de Sica to the new Italian realism, one feels that his method is more complex than Rossellini's, more controlled, disciplined by a feeling for structure and plastic values that is still developing". If "one" feels this, one can "feel" anything.

4. L.G.A. on THE MIRACLE, *Sequence* 11 (Summer 1950).

5. See Alberto Pozzolini, 'Il neorealismo e "Il Politecnico" di Vittorini', *Filmcritica* No. 132: 187-191.

6. SENSO, of course, involves Austria-Hungary rather than Germany.

7. 'Macchina' can mean any kind of 'thing' or machine.

8. There are a few points where the translation seems questionable, e.g., "tendentious" as used on p.100 seems odd ("tendentious", which is never neutral in English, is quite neutral in certain European languages). There are also the usual, apparently inevitable irritating inconsistencies: in the text (p.6) PRELUDE A L'APRES-MIDI D'UN FAUNE is presented as being, apparently, Rossellini's first short; in the filmography (p.137) it appears after DAPHNE; the length of ERA NOTTE A ROMA, which is twice given as 145 minutes in the text (p.87, p.116) appears in the filmography (p.140) as 120 minutes, without explanation; similarly the running times of both VIVA L'ITALIA! and VANINA VANINI differ in the text (p.116) and in the filmography (p.140), although it is stated that the latter was butchered around.

THE NOTEBOOKS OF CAPTAIN GEORGES

Jean Renoir, Fontana Library, 1966.

RENOIR, MY FATHER

Jean Renoir, Fontana Library, 1962.

There is no question but that Jean Renoir's major creative achievement is in the cinema; his films are important not only for their expressive qualities but for their status in the history and development of the cinema. Renoir's books have no such exemplary position but the two that have been translated into English have claims on our attention beyond those implied by their author being the director of LA REGLE DU JEU and LE CAROSSE D'OR.

The evident pleasure which attends Renoir's creative work and which finds expression in the films has, I'm sure, given Renoir much of the popularity he's enjoyed. For him at least there is no problem of affirmation, life is to be experienced, contemplated and revealed: "Notre fonction c'est, avant tout, de regarder le monde de regarder le monde et puis de le raconter . . . et cette fonction porte un nom . . . la démystification", for him: "tout comprehendre, c'est tout pardonner". At the centre of his writing is the same pleasure in the apprehension of an unfragmented, vital and active experience that's offered in the movies.

Renoir's indebtedness to his father has received ample acknowledgement and is quite unmistakable. His description of Auguste Renoir: "The idea that the intellect is superior to the senses was not an article of faith with him" might as well be of himself and just as the activities celebrated in the work of Renoir père, are those of the senses, so the locus of virtuous action and happiness in Renoir's fiction (literary and cinematic) is often sensual and instinctual. The positive and creative forces in *The Notebooks of Captain Georges*, principally Agnes and Georges act instinctually, indeed Agnes is able to redeem Georges from his prison of the world of the "poule de luxe" and the bourgeois experience through her capacity for direct sensual generosity: "Exquisite grace of supple body under flowing garments, bare feet in the dried mud; grace of the hand maidens of King Oedipus . . . I long to touch the brown pure breasts glowing with the softness of a summer night. But I would need to be a poet to evoke the image of Agnes and I am nothing but a member of the upper class whom for a time she caused to forget his bourgeois state. I depict myself and my environment the better to understand our story".

It's an act of great intelligence in the author to deploy the slightly tired imagery of "summer nights" etc. as a sign of the unredeemed nature of the speaker; in this context "bourgeois state" takes on the resonance of "fallen state".

The strength of Renoir fils over Renoir père can be located in the last sentence: "the celebratory attitude of the artist to experience is married in Jean Renoir's best work to the activity of an analytical, critical and ordering intelligence; in contrast the cognitive elements of experience seem almost completely absent from the work of Auguste Renoir". But both men's work shares in an inheritance of the dominant strain of C19th art: realism. We're now past the idiot contemporary responses to the 1874 Impressionist exhibition and can clearly see how much Auguste Renoir participated in and continued the development of painting towards the location of a convincing representation of the visual world. E. H.

Gombrich speaks of Renoir's picture "A dance at the Moulin de la Galette" as a great realistic picture, though of course it and other work of the Impressionist group was not understood as such in the C19th: "The apparent sketchiness has nothing to do with carelessne is but is the outcome of great artistic wisdom. If Renoir had painted in every detail the picture would look dull and lifeless. It was their discovery that the dark shadows of the kind Leonardo used for modelling do not occur in sunlight and open air which barred the traditional way out to the impressionists".

The achievement of the Impressionists was then, though a triumph of originality, part of a tradition: "The great artists of [earlier] periods had made one discovery after another which allowed them to conjure up a convincing picture of the visible world but none of them had seriously challenged the conviction that each object in nature had its definite fixed form and colour. It may be said therefore that Manet and his followers brought about a revolution in the rendering of colours which is almost comparable with the revolution in the representation of forms brought about by the Greeks".

Jean Renoir's films owe much pictorially to C19th painting, their picnics, open-air scenes, dappled light are reminiscent of the Impressionists, as Cocteau said: "Les films noirs sont aussi en couleurs".

It's very striking looking through Renoir's credits to see how many films were constructed on armatures offered by French literature—Beaumarchais, Feydeau, Flaubert, Mirbeau, Merimée, Maupassant and Zola.

The classical models to which many works are directly indebted and in whose characteristic forms most are cast make for the lucidity and comprehensibility of Renoir's work. The relationship of audience and artist is that established by the novelists and is never called into question, expectations about consistent and logical development of narrative are invariably satisfied, and the integrity of the photographic image remains unviolated. Renoir is not an experimental or intellectual artist—his forms are those of his patrimony and are accepted by audience and artist alike.

The Notebooks of Captain Georges follows the structure of one of the most popular and pervasive C19th fictional forms; that of the "conte". In fact it is very like Maupassant, the "conte" dealing, characteristically, with class relationships in the demi-monde (as Georges says it's only in the army or brothel that bourgeoisie and working-classes may meet uninsulated by their separate exclusive exoticisms), the central and distinguishing distinction between Renoir and Maupassant is one of tone and therefore of attitude towards experience. Renoir is Maupassant stripped of frenzy or hate. For Maupassant the brothel is a theatre in which the futility of human contacts and the emptiness of life is defined in a relationship of trade; for Renoir it's a place in which individuals may meet and define themselves undetermined by wealth, role or social position. It's of course in the brothel that George meets Agnes and establishes the central creative experience of both their lives; the brothel is in *Notebooks* a centre of life, freedom and respect for others, its antinomy the bourgeois institution of marriages through which Emilien is able to enslave Agnes.

The Zouave captain at Amiens agrees with Georges that girls from brothels make the best wives, his criteria of female excellence like those of Renoir père: submission to men, unpretentiousness and the capacity to make daily living, household tasks, cooking, child rearing, creative and satisfying experiences. And the relationship of Agnes and Georges is in some ways like that of Auguste Renoir with his wife and models (though it would seem from the hints given in *Renoir my Father* of somewhat greater intensity), certainly Renoir's studio has some of the qualities of Agnes' brothel—the relationship between employer and employee, client and whore, artist and model one of equality, and sanctified by what Renoir père described as the "state of grace which comes from contemplating God's most beautiful creation: the human body". We may note that Jean Renoir chose this as a locus for his life, both in his creative work and directly in his marriage to one of his father's models.

The books seem very personal, almost private, the conversational manner, the intimacy of the experiences described in each and the intensity, particularly of the *Notebooks* dispose the reader to consider the narrator as coterminous with the author, the recurrence of events in historical and fictional narratives confirm the reader's estimate. We learn that Auguste Renoir had in early life an experience very like that of M. Lange, of working in an "art factory" (producing images of Marie Antoinette rather than Arizona Jim), and establishing it as a co-operative, that the names of bassethounds connected with Auguste Renoir recur as the names of Richard Hartley's corgis, that the name of the major-domo in LA REGLE DU JEU and *The Notebooks of Captain Georges* is the same. Jean Renoir states his view, different in some ways from his father's, that the true subject of an artist's work is his own personality; indeed his epigraph to *Renoir my Father*: "It is not Renoir that you are presenting to us, but your own conception of him".

"Of course. History is essentially subjective after all", alerts us to the status of that book as a documentation of his own view of his father. There is for example very little for those interested in Auguste's work or in the man except as apprehended by the son.

We may fairly describe the characteristics of the two books, in view of the author's initial invocation and the internal evidence of tone correspondences, etc. as those of the author, the lives celebrated in them, if only in an imaginary sense, are his own. Thus George's life embodies a series of values close to Renoir's; his disposition towards Agnes and his capacity to find her love and their relationship a sufficient raison d'etre are unequivocally celebrated. The life of George and Agnes displays, like the work of a painter, an ability: "To create a world filled with health and colour", and is similarly beyond criticism.

Auguste Renoir as given in *Renoir my Father* is in some ways a fictional character of the status of Georges; the author confesses the subjective nature of his account, the life covers only selected aspects of the painter's experience and correlates positively with the actions and values of the fictional work. The psychology of Renoir's relationship with his father would seem to have been less than simple and perhaps some of Renoir fils' work may be understood only in those terms. I'm unsure how I would develop such an account; but in view of the remarkable

series of correspondences between events of Auguste's life and the fiction of his son, the conflict that association indicates in Jean Renoir's mind between his relationship with and apprehension of his father and his own creative life, some such account seems to be called for. What one can say is that this nexus of values and associations lies at the centre of his best and most characteristic work.

The view of life as a process, shared with his father, and a concomitant commitment to affairs of the moment rather than to other-directed pursuits, and to anti-intellectualism and celebration of the possibilities of sensual experience animates Jean Renoir's cinematic and literary œuvre. It's, I think, this disposition that inclines Renoir's characteristic generosity, tolerance and warmth to find expression in sentimentality and lack of discrimination. Just as Auguste Renoir regarded the struggle between Communards and Reactionaries as quite secondary to his personal life (he held two safe conducts, one from the commune and one from the Versailles faction) so in LA MARSEILLAISE the Royalists are as well-intentioned and almost as much a centre of value as the Revolutionaries. Bourgeois collaborators in THIS LAND IS MINE, who resist sabotage and opposition to a Nazi occupation are shown as confused, endearing and lacking in culpability for their actions.

Renoir's reluctance to impute culpability implies that actions are devoid of consequence and that any question of responsibility for action is redundant, that all actions are of equal status; this view goes with a warm regard for people—Renoir does not imply that action is derisory or futile but that all selfish, irresponsible or destructive action is either contingent or merely mistaken. His view though is emphatic rather than absolute, his best work marries a delightful recognition of the creative possibilities of experience and affirmatory view of art to a rigorous and tough minded critique and analysis of behaviour.

The differentiation I want to enforce is the one that the differences between LA GRANDE ILLUSION and LE CAPORAL EPINGLE necessitates. The earlier film comprehends an awareness and recognition of the tragic dimensions of experience, a sense of the seriousness of transience, mistakes, prejudice that the latter lacks in its sentimental celebration of universalised good intentions. Everyone in LE CAPORAL EPINGLE from German dentist's daughter to collaborating French NCO are well disposed towards each other and no culpability attaches to time-serving railwaymen, the corporal or even to Hitler.

Both *The Notebooks of Captain Georges* and *Renoir my Father* are part of Renoir's strength, they share in the qualities of the best of his work. The *Notebooks* offers an eloquent testimony to the possibility of an integrated happy and dynamic way of living and satisfyingly affirms the creative possibilities of experience whilst comprehending the tragic disruption of felicity through the intervention of dull, negative and ill-intentioned behaviour; it's not for nothing Emilien is a hardware man. *Renoir my Father* is a very affecting testament of filial love and Jean's apologia for his father's life might well stand for his own: "Great men have no other function in life except to help us to see beyond appearances".

RICHARD COLLINS

OUTLINE OF THE CZECH CINEMA

Langdon Dewey, Informantics, 1971, £1·25.

For the first time we have now all material about Czechoslovak cinema in English. Langdon Dewey's OUTLINE covers the whole history of the Czechoslovak cinema, from the beginning in 1898 till the present day divided into four periods—1. 1898–1918; 2. 1918–1930; 3. 1930–1945; and 4. 1945–1970.

As one can see the periods are not only connected with changes of æsthetic moods and styles, but also with historical and political events. In the beginning the author gives a very useful list of key dates of the history both of the Czechoslovak cinema and of Czechoslovakia as a country. Each part opens with a short summary of events which were duly reflected in the Czechoslovak cinema, e.g. the foundation of Czechoslovak Republik (1918), the Nazi occupation and the second world war (1939–1945), the Stalin—Zhdanov period (1948–1956), the New Wave (1962) and the occupation by Warsaw Pact countries (August 1968).

In the first twenty years the story of the birth of film-industry in Czechoslovakia unfolds, with six names, little known outside Czechoslovakia, but prominent at that period. The second and third periods are full of facts on directors, cameramen and actors, active at that time. There is also a short survey of film production. The most detailed description is given of the fourth period, the so-called New cinema in Czechoslovakia. This part of the OUTLINE can be compared with Nina Hibbin's reference book 'Eastern Europe' (1970) as it covers roughly the same period.

Langdon Dewey's description of New cinema is the most interesting part of the study and includes about 80 names i.e. almost twice as much material as the Czechoslovak section of Hibbin's guide (48 names). The author not only opens before us unknown pages of Czechoslovak cinema, but also gives many interesting details on film-makers dealt with, which are the more welcome, as one usually never gets them in official publications or indeed anywhere else. New facts are also given on cinéastes of the New Wave, who are comparatively well-known in the West, like Milos Forman, Vera Chytilova, Jaromil Jires and Stefan Uher. OUTLINE conveys a complete picture based on the author's expert knowledge of the whole scene. Langdon Dewey has done not only the job of a critic and a researcher, but also shown himself a competent historian of the Czechoslovak cinema. One feels only sorry that such obviously profound knowledge and the wealth of factual material have been used for a rather small reference book (122 pages) instead of serving as a basis for a large critical work on the chosen subject, which certainly would merit such an extended study. The author could have written a definitive history of this interesting chapter of world cinema (on the lines of Jay Leyda's KINO—the history of Soviet cinema—perhaps). The editing and the whole appearance of the OUTLINE might well have been better, especially considering the price of £1·25. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, this book will be of great value for every serious student of cinema, for journalists and critics and everybody who is really interested in Czechoslovak cinema.

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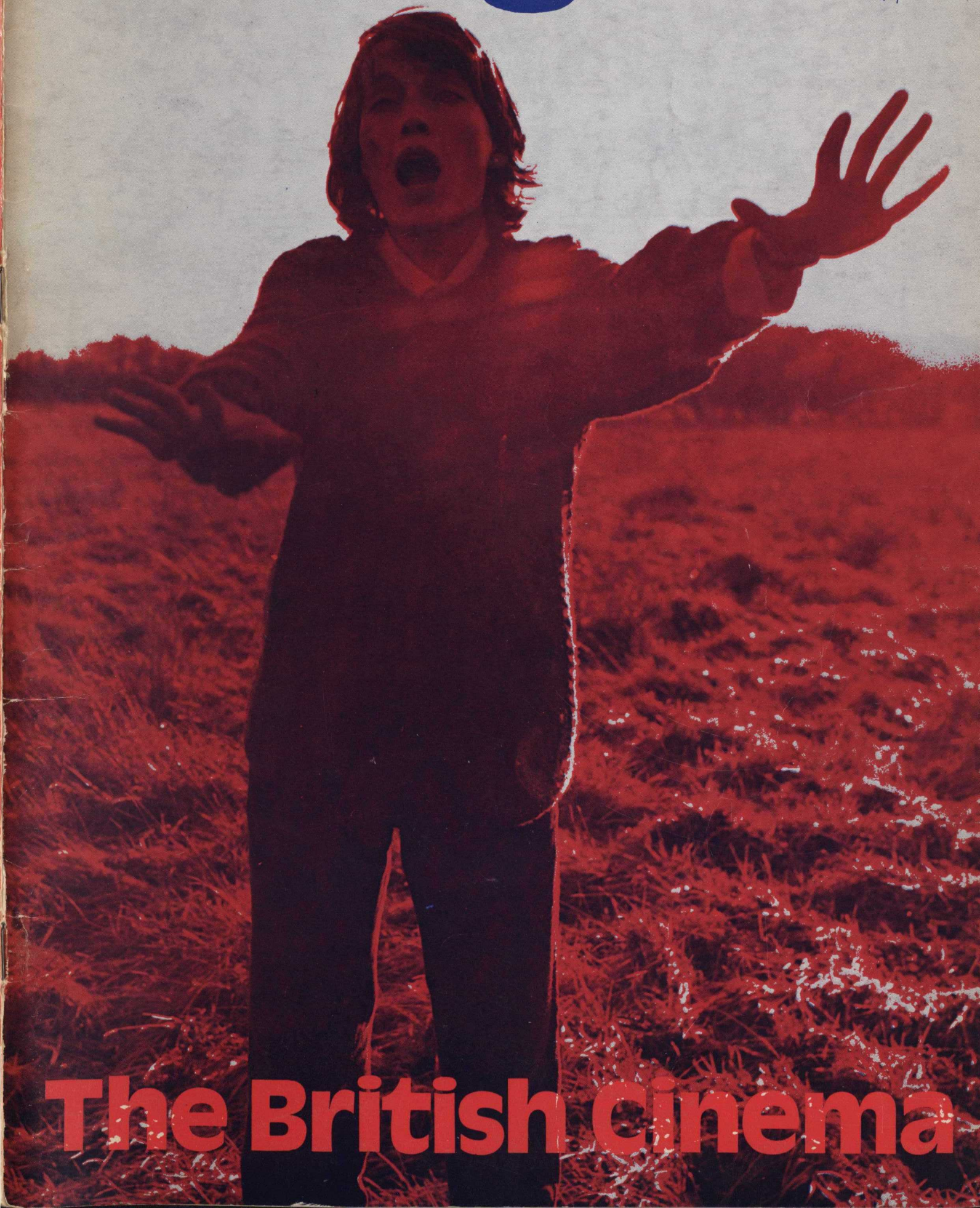

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Never mind the quality
feel the width

Between style and ideology

Thomas Elsaesser

The British Cinema.

1

Reisz's **Morgan**

During the last ten years Britain has produced something like 718 feature films.[1] The majority of them was financed either entirely or in part with foreign capital. If the nationality of the director and/or subject and location are any guide, one arrives at just over 400 films which could reasonably be said to be 'British'. Not many people who aren't paid for doing so can probably claim to have seen them all, and the question poses itself of how, statistics aside, is one to approach critically the output of a decade? Film historians tend to talk about 'landmarks' and the line they take is to sound a roll-call of those films which for one reason or another were given wide publicity at the time — from **Room At the Top, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,** via **Tom Jones, This Sporting Life, A Hard Days' Night** to **Morgan** and **Women In Love.** The implication is that the chronological sequence represents a meaningful development in other respects, although the belief that whatever gave them their popularity or press-coverage must be a sign of permanent value and importance is never explicitly justified. That such a continuity, in any but the most trivial sense, may be just a convenient fiction and seriously misrepresent both actual achievements and the more creative tendencies underlying it, must be apparent to anyone remotely familiar with the caprices of the professional critics (sometimes bold enough to defend their omissions by complaining that they hadn't been sent press-tickets), or the stranglehold exerted by the distribution circuits on production and release, with the inevitable financial censorship this implies. Added to this a dose of snobbery, an incurable bias against the cinema as something that can be looked at seriously, and the result is likely to be distorted.

And yet, when this is said, there is no disguising the fact that good British films during the last ten years are few and far between, and those few have more often been made by foreigners. Hardly a single British film matches Polanski's **Cul de Sac,** Skolimowski's **Deep End,** or Antonioni's **Blow Up**, and directors like Losey, Lester, Fleischer and Preminger, when they work in a British setting seem to convey more 'Englishness' in their films than the amorphously international products signed by Richardson and Yates or the irretrievably parochial films of the Boultings, Ralph Thomas or Montgomery Tully. Abroad, the British cinema has a poor reputation (and that not only because it likes to export such gems as **On the Buses,** recently seen in Hamburg as 'Wir lieben unsern Doppeldecker'). True, there have been international awards — **The Knack, If . . .,** and more recently **The Go-Between** and **The Devils.** In some quarters, the 'renaissance' of the 50s is still fondly remembered, and in France young directors like Platts-Mills or Loach, have almost something of an 'underground' reputation. Maybe this is as much as can be expected, it is certainly no worse than for instance, Germany's record since the war — though looking at the film scene today, there is a German 'alternative' cinema with feature films, 'experimental' and 'political' films on a scale quite unimaginable in this country.

Why should it be that Britain with a long-established, at times prolific, though now obviously ailing industry, seems incapable of producing feature films which could rate with the best made in France, Italy, America, Sweden or Japan? Perhaps this is an impossible question, and therefore impossible to answer. What follows is an attempt — no doubt by some considered unfair, because relying on assumptions which could be interpreted as prejudices — to make a case against the British cinema in the way it has been practiced and also written about. The case is based on raising certain issues concerning feature films in general that have been discussed both in Britain and elsewhere, notably the use and function of style, the question of a film's latent ideological bias, the form and content of cinematic realism, and the implications of Hollywood's lapsed hegemony. The problem is that from this perspective the British cinema seems to inhabit the worst of several worlds, displaying all too many vices and practically none of the virtues of the commercial cinema, while never having seriously ventured into the realm of an 'art' cinema at all. To aim one's sight this high may appear overlooking the trees for some idealist wood, but a time in which film-making is evidently undergoing a drastic transformation seems as good as any to try and adjust one's vision. The contention is that — on a very casual acquaintance with the British cinema — **Blind Date** and **Peeping Tom,** for example, might be more significant films to have been made in 1959 than **Look Back in Anger,** that **Sammy Going South** and **A High Wind in Jamaica** are more personal works than **This Sporting Life** and **If . . .**, and that even **Brides of Dracula** deserves a more lasting place in British film history than **Oh What a Lovely War.**

If these judgements seem at all like heresies it is because British film criticism has always favoured a loosely sociological view — perhaps by necessity as much as by choice — which at its best has managed to define the attitudes that films voluntarily or involuntarily project about British life, on the subject of politics, the working class, sex, the army, individual responsibility, religion or education. Any more strictly aesthetic angle has always been difficult to pursue, for a variety of reasons, not all of which are peculiar to the British cinema. One that stands out nonetheless is very aptly defined in *A Mirror For England*: 'If a clearly marked personal style is one's criterion of interest, then few British films reward the concern given to such directors as Dreyer, Bunuel, Franju and Renoir.' It is the strength of Raymond Durgnat's book that from the outset he accepts the limitations of the British cinema, for it goes a long way towards justifying his thematic analysis, and it allows him to isolate very cogently some of the basic ideological differences underlying British and American film-making of the forties and fifties.

Homological Structures

However, the most obvious objection to any sociological approach is that it is neither film-history nor film-criticism, but uneasily shares a certain positivism with the former and an evaluative stance with the latter. The exercise has a way of becoming tautological: one analyzes in films those aspects as significant which confirm one's assumptions, without appreciable gain in the accuracy of one's observations, even if the examples broaden the basis of one's reference. Films undoubtedly bear a relation to social life, but it is hardly more direct than the way parliamentary debates relate to economic and political realities. Each one has, to a greater or lesser extent, its own 'code' and in both cases, the code is integral part of the message. How exactly this code is constiuted in a film is being increasingly studied, but it covers to some extent the ground commonly described as 'style'.

The exact way artistic considerations, with their autonomous standards and values, come into contact with the financial reality is — on the epistemological level — a very difficult point. Recent efforts to establish 'homological structures' seem most likely to provide a clue, given the assumption that they play a mediating role. The problems involved in such a study of the ideological elements in both film-aesthetics and film-production are prodigious, and it presupposes at least two things: that it is possible to identify and describe historically as well as structurally the conventions, intentions and practices which constitute the aesthetic level, and likewise, that the mechanisms and motives which govern the financial and economic factors can also be seen to possess their own logic. As with previous issues of *Monogram,* we are here concerned with the degree of aesthetic 'coherence' of a certain type of cinema, as a prerequisite to drawing any conclusions about the nature of an interaction between style and ideology.

Ideological critique implies that there is always another meaning underlying the ostensible one, and that this meaning reflects the realities of a social situation. The emergence of this type of criticism during the last decade has a particular relevance to the cinema, and especially the British cinema, being very much a cinema where individual and collective intentions have been communicated, both verbally and on film, in 'class' terms. Such a critique is not new in England. For example, on those comparatively rare occasions when British film-makers or critics have felt in a polemical mood, it has often been a question of some form of social or moral commitment (Lindsay Andersons' *Stand Up, Stand Up*[2] comes to mind) which, when scrutinized by someone like Durgnat who did not mince his words, showed its ideological underbelly, namely the rallying of middle-class intellectuals to the defence of British liberalism, covering a rearguard action of condescending nostalgia about the heartiness of working class life.[3] It takes very little to prove, for example, that the idea of realism to be found in the British documentry school and Free Cinema showed a very rudimentary understanding of social reality and embodied a whole number of romantic fictions, manifestly and often selfconsciously 'fabricated' on the level of stylistic effect. What one deplores is that the British cinema is unlikely to come up in the near future with its equivalent of **Advise and Consent, Hands Over The City, The Battle of Algiers** or even **Z.** It has something to do with the British attitude to national institutions as an unfit subject for anything other than the Carry On treatment and perhaps also sixties Britain has developed a tradi with the fact that during the sixties Britain has developed a tradition of competent journalism; one must be grateful that the response to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders will in all probability not be a remake of **Shipyard Sally,** but more likely a documentary along the lines of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett's **Rank and File.**

A Realized Point of View

On the other hand, what is most absent in British film-criticism is any very precise or even mildly provocative concept of cinematic specificity, of what the cinema can do better than any other medium, or at least in what its fundamental aesthetic virtues lie compared with literature, visual

art or journalism. Back in 1948 Richard Winnington wondered how so many British films managed to contrive 'with something like genius neither to inform, excite, entertain, titillate or engage the eye'.[4] This complaint of uninspired drabness has been repeated frequently since, but only in 1962, when *Movie* in its first number published a 'talent histogram' did the debate take a more decisive turn. *Movie*'s intention was a straightforward indictment of the British cinema in favour of Hollywood (only Losey, Fregonese [sic], Hamer, Holt and Karel Reisz were credited with anything better than competence), and the editorial stated that 'all we can see (in Free Cinema) is a change of attitude which disguises the fact that the British cinema is as dead as before, perhaps it was never alive. Our films have improved, if at all, only in their intentions. We are still unable to find evidence of artistic sensibilities in working order. There is as much genuine personality in **Room at the Top,** method in **A Kind of Loving** and style in **A Taste of Honey** as there is wit in **An Alligator Named Daisy,** intelligence in **Above us the Waves** and ambition in **Ramsbottom Rides Again.**' What such abrasive language wanted to repudiate was the then widely held belief that Richardson, Schlesinger, Clayton or Anderson had somehow given the British cinema an artistic form and a sense of style. By taking the *Cahiers* line on 'auteurs', *Movie* rightly sought to get closer to a specifically cinematic vision, for the 'auteur theory', despite its ideological bias in favour of an individualist mythology, is still an indispensable instrument to get the properly aesthetic criteria into focus, because across all the complexities of producing a film, it concentrates on the evidence of a realized and articulated point of view. *Movie* had its own prejudices and blind spots, but its writers convincingly showed that they had actually looked at the films they wrote about, whereas in those days *Sight and Sound* was still basing itself on plot-synopses and press-handouts.

An important question, then, about the British cinema is 'why are good British bad?'[5] *Movie* answered it by the bland assertion that there just wasn't anyone around who was talented enough. But film-history shows that 'talent' in the cinema is often as much a function of concentrated opportunity (Hollywood), of a national traition strong in the visual arts or with a solid critical and intellectual culture, such as Italy or France and Germany before the War, and not least of all, it seems to appear where there are active film-schools and a nationalized industry (Poland and Czechoslovakia). None of these conditions prevail in Britain today, and the few film-makers of any talent have been consistently denied opportunities to work during the sixties (Powell, Holt, Mackendrick), so that a difficult and unfavourable economic situation for 'British' films coincided with a dearth of new ideas in film-theory and criticism, which even the sporadic appearance of *Movie* did little to remedy. Now that this state of affairs appears to be changing, one still has reason to deplore the distance that separates the 'new' critics from those who are actively engaged in making films, neither apparently having much confidence in the other's intentions and aims.

One possible reason why Britain so far has hardly ever developed a truly cinematic cinema is the long-standing (and perhaps not altogether dishonourable) streak of philistinism in British culture, if by philistine we understand a critical attitude which makes aesthetic values depend heavily on what are first and foremost moral assumptions putting forward conventionalized norms of conduct and feeling or are designed to consolidate socially desirable behaviour. A director like Losey can use such a conception dialectically, but the fact is that today, the social conditions and the intellectual climate no longer give much credibility to any argument which conflates moral prescriptions

Suppressed finer sentiments? **(The Music Lovers)**

with aesthetic criteria or confuses ideological assumptions with universal truth.

In the sphere of criticism, this tradition has produced a series of misleading antitheses of, for example, fantasy and realism as different 'genres', entertainment and culture as mutually exclusive, and it has encouraged a neglect of artistic style because seen across a preconceived idea of content. Style in a more traditional sense is vision articulated, but as such it is by necessity autocratic, because its aim is to impose — for the duration of a film or the length of a novel — an 'order' on the phenomena and a 'model' on the world.

As the mechanisms involved in constructing a conventional intrigue or plot become more apparent, the idea that a film is in some sense 'exploring' a given reality or reproducing it seems less and less plausible: thanks to semiologists like Metz we now have impressive proof that every shot in a film is already a sentence, a statement, the assertion of an attitude, and that therefore no image can claim to be neutral or purely referential in relation to what it depicts. In the face of an embarassingly rich and expressive potential inherent in filmic language, where every image is always in danger of becoming, so to speak, an exclamation mark, it is not surprising that one of the great aesthetic priorities in the history of the cinema has been visual understatement, the low emphasis, the ironic tone, the symbolic allusion as against the direct statement, and finally the search for 'realism' — all efforts to gain conscious control over the plethora of attitudes and to detract skilfully from the obtrusive voyeurism which the camera produces when set in motion by a director who does not subdue the prying eye into a unified vision or use the diverse perspectives to create an intelligible space. Out of the multitude of individual 'statements' that make up a film, a speaking voice will have to detach itself, and that is why, when discussing the aesthetic meaning of a narrative film, one is inevitably trying to listen to that voice and to look for the articulated point of view as the principle of coherence.

Hitherto, in the vast majority of films, certain conventions in the patterning of drama and narrative have regulated the relation between descriptive and interpretative, naturalistic and symbolic potential of the filmic discourse, but with the decay of these conventions and the impoverishment of dramatic fictions in which to actualize significant experiences, film-makers are having to create the framework that mediates vision and reality more and more out of their knowledge of a strictly cinematic, often self-referential meta-language. This application of

knowledge about the cinema itself is what today constitutes the modern idiom.

What is most apparent in the British films over the past decade which have freed themselves from the depiction of social stereotypes and turned towards a more 'European' cinema of individual character and consciousness is the lack of sophistication in the handling of this cinematic syntax, when compared with the continental 'art' cinema of the same period: Schlesinger, Anderson, Russell, Richardson hardly measure up to, say, Louis Malle, René Allio, Olmi or Wajda — for even if one accepts that a concentration of talents like Chabrol, Truffaut, Rohmer, Godard and Rivette is rare by any standards, the excessive modesty of British 'quality' directors has disconcerting implications. There is hardly a director working regularly in Britain today (except Losey) who can be said to have — whatever his personal themes or the level on which he chooses to work in the industry or outside — a specifically cinematic eye, an approach to the material he is dealing with, which is shaped by the requirements and possibilities of the cinema, and that there is consequenly no director who has an awareness of form and style sufficiently sensitive that each movement of the camera counts, each angle and composition of the frame is there to advance the thematic movement, embody a point of view or clarify the action. This may be a harsh judgement, but loose-jointed narratives, careless handling of camera movements, misplaced visual emphasis seem far more often the cause of good British films being bad than lack of promising subjects. The wasting of a close-up, a travelling for mere effect or an awkward zoom is as noxious in the cinema as a rambling, imprecise, woolly prose-style in a novel, and no less noticeable.

Bar-Mitzva **(Sunday Bloody Sunday)**

Fade-out on Realism

That style or 'form' has a decisive effect on the meaning of the material is perhaps clearest if one looks at the British cinema's reputed strength — its socially conscious realism. During the late fifties, when a certain populist revival reached the cinema, percolating down from left-wing intellectuals and supported by writers and playwrights, there seemed a willingness to confront the realities of British society by treating those subjects and aspects of daily life as fit material for dramatized fiction which had previously been either taboo or hopelessly distorted. Certainly, an unmistakeable difference — even today — exists between the naive 'class-collaborationist' attitude of Bernard Miles' **Chance of a Lifetime** (1949), Mackendrick's **The Man in the White Suit** (1951) and Clayton's **Room at the Top** (1958). All three however, are full of stock characters and situations, but only Mackendrick's film, despite its schematic confrontations of working class types, white-collar scientist and the capitalists, has the stylistic qualities which transcend the sociological 'errors' and political naiveties of the script. It brings alive the clash between an isolationist idealism both ruthless and whimsical, and the conflicting class interests in which it is caught. Mackendrick's style is far from 'realistic', yet the scene where Guinness' white suit disintegrates and is pulled to bits by jeering workers and board members has a dramatic and psychological truth which Clayton's film conspicuously lacks, even though **Room at the Top** is both more proletarian in its attitude and accurate in its social observations.

The fact is that by seeking 'realism' primarily on the level of location and atmosphere, the British cinema, especially during its 'renaissance' has remained almost as naïve as ten years earlier: it confined itself to a sometimes astute but more often mechanical combination of an industrial (northern) working-class setting with readily identifiable characters and class stereotypes. The conflict of work and leisure, or between the provinces and London, which formed the backbone of the Hoggart-Wesker offensive, became submerged in a cinematic formula where realism meant living in a cramped terrace house and going to work on a bike. From big-bosomed mum or the brassy blonde in satin blouse, to tough talking police constables and Woodbine smoking pub mates, the heroes (and the audience) could without an instant's hesitation pick their side and hold their own when it came to defending the dignity of the working man with a few obscenities. Sympaties were loaded, the dramatic conflicts either pushed into melodrama or they dissipated themselves in squalid little compromises, and the fade-out became a popular device, because it conveniently suspended the issues whenever they became interesting.

Not for nothing did 'kitchen sink' become a term of abuse: Free Cinema quickly demonstrated a fundamental point about 'realism' in the cinema — that it is purely conventional and therefore infinitely 'corruptible' through repetition, unless it is, as in the American cinema, stylized into a 'genre', where it can become the readily accessible and comprehensible vocabulary in an overtly metaphorical discourse. This, however, did not happen in Britain, and within a matter of half a dozen films, the admirable desire for a hard-hitting, socially committed cinema spawned cliché after cliché, until the scene of a couple overlooking belching gas-works and a row of sooty houses from the surrounding hills became as meaningful a shot as the Eiffel tower in a picture about Paris. Only where a psychological or moral conflict between the characters is sufficiently well established, where there is a theme, an argument to absorb the setting into the metaphoric language of emotions and actions (as does happen intermittently in **This Sporting Life**) can such a conception of realism escape from exploiting a social milieu simply for its spurious exiticism.

The latter is much in evidence in a film like **Get Carter.** The sordid has become unashamedly decorative, and the tough, brutal act or the sadistic gesture has to cover Mike Hodges' tracks wherever the plot motivation becomes too threadbare not to be conspicuous by its absence. What might have been a sombre accumulation of actes gratuits to give an image of unrelieved evil and degradation shrinks from its own nihilism by having a stock revenge motif plugging all the gaps — which is furthermore grafted on a sentimentality difficult to bear (Michael Caine sobbing as he watches his niece

being seduced in a blue movie), let alone take seriously. **Get Carter** is 'successful' because it acknowledges the frankly erotic-sexual undercurrent of the action movie and indulges in a protracted sado-masochistic fantasy which has a plot so complicated as to become unimportant, or rather, it uses the obstacles set up for the hero as titillations on the way to the gratifying climax which cleverly combines ejaculation and death.

Get Carter confirms that both the action movie and the thriller have not survived self-conscious adaptation by nostalgic Hollywood addicts in any form other than reductive parody. By contrast, Ken Loach's idea of an effective realism however, has little to do with film history being reflected in shallow waters — more with the way television applies its highly stylized and conventionalized formal techniques to often unconventional, contingent and unstructured material. The dilemma is that muck-raking exposure of social sores has to be processed into smooth-textured popular entertainment. In **Poor Cow,** his least successful and yet formally most ambitious feature film, Loach deliberately de-dramatized the narrative and made use of the more readily adaptable methods of ciné vérité (camera 'following' the heroine 'around'. fictional 'interviews', first person voice-over, *etc*). The film manages to build up an engagingly convincing picture of life as the female appendage to a gang of petty London criminals, but stylistically it disappoints as soon as it tries to manipulate the setting for an emotive-symbolic statement — as for example in the scene where Carol White and Terence Stamp are seen kissing under a waterfall. They are so obviously pleased at having found a piece of scenery which resembles nothing more closely than the mentholated cigarette ads on television or in the High Street that it becomes impossible to tell whether Loach intended to indicate the poverty of his characters' idea of happiness, or whether happiness in tv-jargon just 'is' a waterfall. Neither possibility can be discounted on the evidence of the film itself, because the director is more concerned with depicting his heroine in a series of emotionally moving or touching scenes than in translating his own point of view into unequivocal cinematic terms. The same is true of **Kes**: in his rightful desire to put across a strong story for a wide audience, Loach shows little interest in whether his imagery courts the cliché or avoids it by a kind of detached underplaying. That this comes rather close to a false naivety has perhaps half-consciously been admitted by Loach himself, when he remarked that he did not like filming in colour, because one could not stop colour from looking pretty — which may be true of television but is definitely not the case if we think of the nuanced way Cukor, Sirk, Minnelli, Ray or Preminger can handle colour.

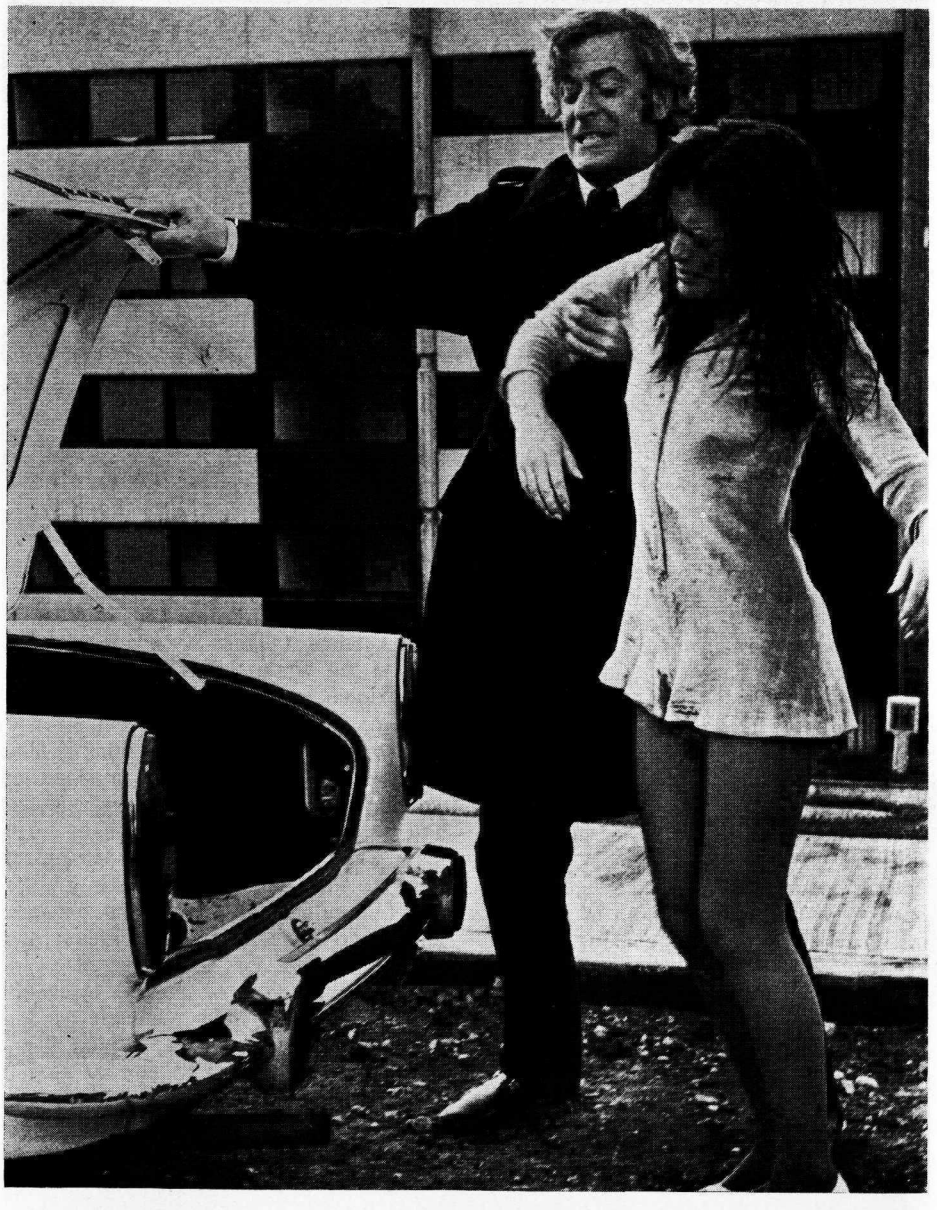
Keeping up with the Schlesingers

Loach is basically a journalist, and a good one, for he cares more about getting some of his points across within a system hostile to his political convictions and to mobilize people on social issues he knows are important. Yet from Loach's robust indifference about the subtleties of style and mise-en-scene, it is aesthetically a short step to the solemn pomposities of a middle-brow weepie like **Sunday Bloody Sunday,** which measured by its own Antonionoi-esque ambitions, appears incoherent — in its form and thematically. In the long run it is perhaps less grave that Schlesinger gives away an interesting subject to contend himself with psychological commonplaces about emotional frustration, *ennui,* moral impotence and the mortifications of middle-class middle-age sex. What is more worrying is that his mise-en-scene, all too eclectic in its up to the minute professional effects, should be accepted as representing a personal style and as giving a convincing portrayal of its subject.

There are the actors' setpieces, which once again point to the chief 'vice' of nearly all film acting in Britain — that it did not free itself of the theatre before it was swallowed up by the mannerisms of television acting. There is the concession to prevailing fashion which mars one of the more potentially interesting scenes (what would one not give to have been spared the hand-held 'subjective' tracking shot accompanying the Jewish boy during Bar-Mitzva — as if Peter Finch's identification with his nephew at this point was not already quite explicit), and Schlesinger's didactic handling of visual and dramatic symbolism is little short of catastrophic (the business with the telephones becomes so insistent that one finally suspects an ad for the GPO). An all too rare example of a good visual idea, on the other hand, is the reappearance of Murray Head's arty object for Peter Finch's garden in a West End department store. Its swelling to gigantic proportions could have made a critical point about Peter Finch's increasing obsession with Murray Head, while the latter merely uses him in the way he uses his art — as an object for bargaining, but alas this theme is never followed through, and the criticism is rather swamped by the sentimental context in which the scene appears, with Peter Finch driving along Piccadilly about to be molested by one of his less refined homosexual ex-lovers.

It is interesting that where the story does seem to imply a dramatic climax (the face to face confrontation of Murray Head's two lovers, Peter Finch and Glenda Jackson, outside the house of their acquaintances), Schlesinger re-

A protracted sado-masochistic fantasy **(Get Carter)**



sorts to an oddly pedestrian kind of naturalism, disingenuously presenting us with a piece of anti-dramatic non-action (disingenuous, because preceded by a formidable build-up of cross-cuts, camera going in and out of focus, so that no spectator can miss the 'significance' of the encounter — which is unfortunately quite typical of the British cinema's concept of realism, *ie* something as awkward, lukewarm, anti-climactic as 'real-life'. The greatest problem which British directors seem to have in this respect is to present their characters at once in a sympathetic light and critically. Instead of incorporating the critical perspective (which is, if one likes, the thematic axis of a film of this kind) into the continuity of the action, through the mise-en-scene, the decor, or the nature of the dramatic confrontations, with characters embodying dialectically conflicting, complementing views, the practice is to sentimentalize each character in turn (by means of a 'subjective' presentation), avoid a clearly structured dramatic conflict (because felt as unreal) and let the criticism emerge (by default of a directorial point of view) somewhere between all characters. This is precisely what happens in **Sunday, Bloody Sunday,** and it is as if among the Free Cinema directors the documentary myopia of British realism from the 'thirties and 'forties had never been corrected by the focussing lenses of the 'well-made' fiction film. The trouble with such a bi-focal mise-en-scene is that it concedes rather too much to the critics who claim that the narrative cinema has outlived its day: once one realizes, as one is bound to do in Schlesinger's film, that the dramatic-symbolic mechanisms and the stylishness allow the director to avoid taking position vis-à-vis his story and to shield behind a series of divergent subjective views, the very procedures of filmic narrative become false, one watches an imposture of human behaviour, a manipulation of pseudo-problems, where unconvincing alternatives and choices are conveyed through gestures stripped of their authenticity. After the intriguingly promising first sequence which visually introduces the three protagonists through the relation of their hands to their professional and domestic environment (Peter Finch as a doctor delicately touching the belly of a patient, Glenda Jackson clumsily knocking over an ashtray and stamping the ash into the carpet, Murray Head poignantly characterized by the empty appartment where a mechanical contraption vibrates a pencil rhythmically over a piece of paper to produce an artistic design) **Sunday Bloody Sunday** is a disappointment, and one is still waiting for the film that Schlesinger might be capable of. The levels of physical and moral incompatibility indicated in this opening scene could have been developed thematically by the rest of the film, but what one gets is a dwelling on the obvious which disfigures the emotional truth of the situation into carricature. Unlike the Americans, British directors rarely see physical detail as more than either a 'realistic touch' or an outright symbol, instead of using it as the basis for developing moral themes, and there is in **Sunday Bloody Sunday** neither dramatic shape nor visual elucidation of the kind which could give the incipient dialectic (of hyper-developed moral sensibilities confronting their own physicality, of emotionally sterile human beings hungering for tactile sensations), a meaning that would transcend the anecdotal. One's frustration with the film, as with many other British movies, comes from the fact that one so clearly sees the level of intention appear behind the images. The lucid account of the death-agony of bourgeois human relationships, however, never materializes.

The feeling that **Sunday, Bloody Sunday** seems insufficently worked out in the mise-en-scene and contradictory in terms of its dramatic structure is underlined by the fact that it appears trapped in the very contradictions of the ideology it purports to portray realistically (and therefore criticise). It is not so much by presenting his characters as unknowable entities at the mercy of their psychological hang-ups (whose only relations with each other seem to be sexual ones), that Schlesinger implicitly acknowledges the decay of the idividualist ethics on which the film is built, but because this state of affairs is interpreted as immutable, absolute, tragic. By hypostatizing the neuroses of his protagonists, abstracting them from any moral, social or indeed metaphysical substratum of values and convictons, Schlesinger tries to universalize them, make their predicament representative of the 'human condition', but in fact seems to get the worst of all possible worlds. Since they are made to appear as puppets of their own sexual obsessions, the supposedly tragic pathos towards which the film is slanted, never quite rings true, because it lacks the vital dramatic ingredient of an inner necessity. As spectator, one is too much outside the characters not to notice the manifest contradiction, the 'false consciousness' displayed. The forces within them and outside are never made apparent in dramatic terms (the surface realism and the naturalistic style prevent the conflicts of class, cultural background or occupation from becoming symbolically present in the action, instead of being merely sketched in as anecdotes) and thus the underlying dilemma of personal autonomy (for instance, the obstinacy of Murray Head who wants to be treated by his loves as a full human being rather than a negotiable sexual object) conflicting with the sense of impotence in the face of a whole, passively endured web of extra-individual influences, is constantly there as an unresolved irritant to one's perception and estimation of the characters, without ever reaching the point where it is directly focussed on by the mise-en-scene or the action. Instead, Schlesinger uses symbolic parallelisms to put across a sense of the inevitable: Glenda Jackson's father is seen to neglect his wife, chiefly by being on the 'phone to business collegues in America. Her lover, Murray Head, likewise leaves her after receiving a 'phone call from New York. Such manipulations of the plot to play 'fate' to the protagonists and deadlock them in a superficial tragic irony, however, can only discredit the narrative film as a valid dramatic medium.

Much of the work of the directors who were associated with Free Cinema in the late fifties tends to show this discrepancy of accepting the characters at their subjective evaluation, and yet pull the threads of the plot to bring them into line when the issues raised become too complex to fit the predestined pattern. What might have seemed a provocative subjectivism with working-class heroes like Arthur Seaton, Machin or Billy Liar (which only implied cheating a little when rounding off scenes) now looks more like an artistic defect on the level of the mise-en-scene indicating deeper ideological contradiction. It makes films like **Sunday, Bloody Sunday** symptomatic not only of the state of the cinema in this country, but of the intellectual establishment which closes its ranks to hail them as masterpieces. Marx once said that what made artists and intellectuals ideological representatives of a particular social class was their inability to transcend imaginatively the limits which their class does not transcend in social life. Judging by the reviews given to Schlesinger's film, the recognition and identification was so complete, the defeatism which the picture exudes so evidently suited to the mood of a post-welfare post-affluence Tory Britain that it will probably be as characteristic of middle class attitudes in the early seventies as **Brief Encounter** (a film of considerably higher artistic integrity) was for the immediate post-war period.

Dostoyevsky in the New Forest

Speaking of **Brief Encounter,** the spirit of sacrifice and renunciation that runs through Lean's film reaffirmed an already self-doubting and slightly odd puritanism (what strikes one today is the erotic excitement Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson get out of their feelings of guilt and shame), which nevertheless conveyed the existence of libidinal urges, the more precious for being kept bottled up. By contrast, the disaffection of socially sanctioned moral and sexual behaviour in the sixties spread to the middle class only to produce — in the cinema at least — an invariably phoney 'joie de vivre'. Sexual liberation is either romantised into jolly romps on Hampstead Heath taken in slow motion or soft-focus, risqué scenes of homosexual lovemaking, or it is vulgarized into a hunt for phallic symbolism and naturalistic displays of nudity. *A Mirror for England* draws attention to a different stylization of the 'life-force' in British and American movies, which is especially true when one thinks of the anarcho-humorous element in British low-brow comedy signifying a healthy vitality towards the 'facts of life', and compares it to the far more complex drive-orientated hero of almost all Hollywood genres, with the attendant mythologdy of success, domination and instinctual gratification.

However, a better clue to the nature of the joie de vivre in recent British films than the Carry-On type comedy is to be

got from Ken Russell's films. What **The Music Lovers,** for instance, has in common with **Sunday, Bloody Sunday** is that in both cases the leading actress is Glenda Jackson. With an undeniable dedication to her roles, she aggressively flaunts a kind of sullen violence which in Schlesinger's film occasionally teeters on the edge of a more revealing hysteria. Her exhibitionist vulgarity in **The Music Lovers,** however, only just convinces us that it is the over-reaction to a whole spectrum of suppressed finer sentiments. In both films she comes to personify the frustrated life-urge, a fact that points up the different sociological intentions of their directors. Schlesinger is solidly upper middle class, and so are his characters. Glenda Jackson still manages a wry smile which must be the female equivalent of the stiff upper lip. Ken Russell, on the other hand, whatever his personal background, seems to aim his films more or less cosciously at the lower middle class, for he has taken not only television techniques, but even more so, television assumptions to the cinema.

With the adaptation of half a dozen composers' lives, one major English novel and one minor one behind him, Ken Russell appears as a particularly deplorable (because hugely successful) example of cultural vandalism thinking itself emancipated — an attitude which is rather well characterized by his own words: 'What I'd really like to do would be to get my own little film unit together like I used to in the old days when Shirley and I would go around London making films and carrying our equipment on the 'bus. And we could all go down to the New Forest and maybe I'd film a story about a composer or a Dostoyevsky story, and all the unit could bring down their families and I'd put them up in caravans or a hotel, and if it was fine we'd work, but if it rained, well we'd just go off and have a party.'[6]

The problem with taking a high-brow view of such an attitude is that it ignores the stamina, the proletarian bloody-mindedness about Russell's naivety. It gives an ambivalence to his impact, if not his methods which deserves closer attention. The ambivalence can perhaps be pinpointed by saying that his films are both the petit-bourgeois' cultural wet dream and exercises in contemporary camp, and that Russell probably doesn't mind which way his audience takes them. Vitality still means having a good time, and the rest is propaganda. Objectively, Dostoyevsky in the New Forest bridges the already minimal gap between the kind of demi-culture purveyed by the Colour Supplement features and its parody in the ads on the opposite page which offer two-tone finish plastic reproductions of Michelangelo'esque nudes entitled 'Ecstasy', luxury bound, leather grained, hand-tooled editions of *Germinal* and *Oliver Twist,* and complete sets of Rachmaninov, Beethoven and Gilbert and Sullivan for the hi-fi audio unit. Russell's undeniable talent, however, consists precisely in the abilty to give a sense of dynamism and energy — indeed, exploration, to his blantantly commecializing instincts, and because he has all the skill of an autodictat without any of the inhibitions which might spoil the fun of using Dostoyevsky or Tchaikovsky for his own crazy quilt. Russell is the imaginative boy who has let himself into the wardrobe department of European culture and by putting on the clothes to see how they fit his own fantases, he gives them a good airing: his films manage to shake out much of the extremely sophisticated psychological superstructure of bourgeois 'high' art based on sublimation, while at the same time indulging in the more spectacular aspects of the romantic tradition. The element of anti-bourgeois revolt in the romanticism of Tchaikovsky, for example, is in **The Music Lovers** not much more than a kind of with-it flamboyance, put in the service of a mystifying but still widely credited cult of artistic creation as a form of instinctually inspired magic, irrational, uncontrollable, and fed by some warp in the psychological make-up or a physiological personality defect.

Hanno Buddenbrook in Thomas Mann's novel swoons as he plays Wagner on the piano and contracts a fever from which he never recovers — but Mann leaves open the chain of casuality (if any) linking these events. An ironic ambiguity about the relation between the physiological, psychological and artistic aspects of 'decadence' is of the essence if one wants to avoid the more grossly misleading sides of Freudian interpretation of artistic creativity, but Russell clearly knows no such scruples, and his causality is always painfully explicit. Not only does he exploit the 'programme music' character of Tchaikovsky's work to the hilt, with slow-motion river banks, blossoming fields and birch tree forests visually orchestrating a scherzo here and an overture there, but the continuity of the action itself is subordinated to the music. The old Hollywood technique of the filmed biography — that every well-known piece of music should have an anecdote or a dramatic incident out of composer's life as its causal origin — is both exaggerated and parodied (as in the 1812 Overture sequence). — In either case, images, music and action are strictly the illustrative means to a much simpler end — the pathological psychodrama — and the semantic autonomy of the individual signifying 'strands' is carelessly tossed away, so as to use exclusively what one might call the 'chromatic' qualities expressing 'emotion', without caring how these emotions are themselves structured or articulated within the various aesthetic-dramatic discourses. An example is the scene where Tchaikovsky is performing his piano-concerto at the conservatoire. Zoom-in on his sister, then on Glenda Jackson, then on the Countess, all three placed at strategic points in the audience. As the music swells on the women are given their erotic fantasy sequence to illustrate their degree of appreciation, until eventually we are back with Tchaikovsky's hands playing the piano. The bad habit of film music, where emotional and visual climaxes are remorselessly (the trade term is 'lavishly') orchestrated with romantic musical stereotypes is turned inside out, and the logic of filmic signification inverted: Richard Chamberlain pounds the keys of the piano merely in order to make the ladies' bosoms heave and the violinists seem to work their instruments like gigolos just to force an ecstatic sigh from rapturous and panting lips. Russell's method, not unlike Hodges' in **Get Carter,** though more obvious, is based knowingly on the scarcely subliminal erotic suggestiveness of visual and gestural language when expressing violent emotion on the screen. The object is not to give a psychologically or dramatically coherent story, but to break the basically static situation into a series of exhibitionistic *tableaux vivants,* all variations on the single theme of sexual obsession and sexual disgust, using shock cuts, 'false' visual continuity, montage close-up and a technique frequently employed in tv-films about works of art, namely the combination of superimposition and dissolve, which always gives a luxurious, classy effect. By treating his own filmic material, his locations, his decor and his characters as if they were out of a Rubens or Renoir, Russell shows himself something of a *poseur,* but he also underlines the levelling process which has melted down European art history and coined it into advertising currency, at the same time as it is trying to promote a few technical tricks of the photo lab to the status of works of art.

Libido and Style

British films when featuring artists have traditionally assumed him to be a deranged or otherwise abnormal member of society, whose right of existence and social usefulness is to be regarded with scepticism, where his behaviour does not make him downright suspect. Vulgar psychology and vulgar marxism have helped to bolster this stance and given it respectability to the point where 'debunking' has become the universal recipe of how to correct idealist errors of hagiography. Russell's own attitude is both hagiographic and iconoclastic — he makes Tchaikovsky a middle class hero, then debunks him, and leaves the spectator with the doubtless comforting thought that art is after all nothing more highly motivated than one's bed- and bathroom fantasies. This attitude complements a more recent development where art is interpreted as a 'take-it-or-leave-it' 'doing-my-own-thing' discrete activity, undertaken in the level-headed manner of a commercial transaction and deployed as a way of enjoying social status. To be sure, there are those who for various reasons like to present themselves in this way to their public, partly because artists today have to sell themselves with their products in a kind of package deal, and their work only takes on value where the name advertises the art, so that both become objects on the market of cultural consumption. But when, as happens in **Sunday Bloody Sunday** for instance, this defensive posture is taken at face value, one wonders if in fact the result is not an even more philistine attitude. In the portrayal of Murray Head as the young artist, the romantic myth of unconscious creativity and exemption from social norms has become a kind of whimsical child-like irresponsibility and petulance — which could be taken as a critical statement, if only the film had a consistent point of view, in which such a critical conception made sense.

One of the inspirations of art in the nineteenth century was the way the dynamics of eroticism fed into the exploration of reality and the effort of an artist was to transmute his libidinal energy into 'style'. Psychoanalysis, by uncovering these mechanisms, has reduced such an effort ad absurdum, and it would scarcely be an acceptable self-interpretation for a serious artist to suggest to him that his main reason for the kind of work he was doing was sexual. On the other hand, if psychological interpretations of artistic activity have become more and more inadequate (and **The Music Lovers** is there to prove it), his function and role is no more clearly defined by making him appear a hedonistic drop-out conning the idle rich. One need only to think o. Bergman's **Hour of the Wolf,** Franju's **Eyes Without a Face** or Minnelli's **The Bad and the Beautiful** to realize that the 'artist in society' for European (and Hollywood) directors has first and foremost been of interest by the ambiguous nature of the artist's creativity and his perception of the world. The films mentioned all focus on a private vision having to draw on the world outside for its realization, a process which brings about a conflict with the standards and values of the community in which the artist finds himself. Whereas British films tend to see him as an outsider whose otherness one must either somehow accommodate as harmless clowning, or explain away psychologically, the ironic romanticism of European and American films emphasizes the way social conventions and artist and society — may in fact be the *fantastique* is what gives an artist a style, and shows that he has transformed his material into the specific terms of his medium. The chief merit of the British horror movie in this respect is perhaps that it has provided a temporary refuge for aesthetes, idealists and visionaries. Unfortunately, rather too many of Hammer's products do not sustain the promise inherent in their themes, and they bear very visibly the serializing stamp of a commercial set-up unredeemed by anything better than the occasional felicity of an impressively directed sequence. They also seem to suffer more and more from the tensions inherent in the alliance, endemic to the genre as a whole, between faux-naif seriousness and self-conscious parody.

Working in a British setting (Skolimowski's **Deep End)**

Relating Means to Meaning

From the position taken in this article the outlook on the Britsh cinema is a bleak one. In the absence of an economically viable independent cinema of bright young inner pressures deform and distort the artist's vision into creating travesties or becoming altogether destructive. In Britain Michael Powell belongs to this tradition, for in films like **The Small Back Room, Tales of Hoffmann, The Red Shoes,** or **Peeping Tom** he has shown the moral perversion and psychic cruelty which an artist absorbs into his vision of the world, and which forces him into an alienation that makes him — to himself and others — a kind of monster.

It is therefore no accident that all the films cited have a strong formal resemblance to the horror movie, because precisely the processes of thought or intuition which dictate to a director that the most 'realistic' form in which to cast a certain theme — here the relation of Turcs, and apart from directors like Loach in the field of mass-media canvassing, the directors who represent middle-class convictions and ambitions appear neither to have mastered the subtler techniques of the 'liberal' dramaturgy which formed the distinction of Hollywood — the mixing or balancing of audience sympathies, the visual and dynamic definition of a moral or psychological conflict, the symbolic use of detail and particular to indicate universals, the thematic use of colour and 'scope, the transformation of descriptive information and dialogue into action, 'genre' stylization through strong plots — nor did they develop a 'reflective' style in the manner of the European filmmakers with their highly intellectualized use of cinematic space, camera positioning and montage, or the free handling of narrative fictions. In British movies there is no historical depth to character, as in the films of Bertolucci, Belloccio or Visconti, no philosophical literacy as in Rohmer, no psychological investigation of moral values as in Chabrol, no political conception of individual motivation as in Rosi, no spiritual interpretation of personality as in Bresson.

At the same time, the commercial cinema (following the tendency in America and elsewhere) has evidently lost some of its habitual resilience against 'art' cinema influences, and the invasion of bourgeois cultural sanctuaries, while interesting from a sociological point of view, so far has not made for better films. Gone, too, is the working-class cynicism one used to find in British films, which often gave an invigorating dialectical edge to middle class sentimentality. Left- and right-wing anarchism have alike been innoculated with farce and kept within the confines of situation comedy, whimsy, and the humorous double-take. Despite their biting satire, Lester's **How I won the War** and the even more ferociously aggressive **Bed-Sitting Room** are only spluttering firecrackers zig-zagging along the ground before they disappear into the dark. But it is finally the discovery of the 'subjective' style, of 'lyricism' manufactured by means of zoom, soft-focus and slow-motion to replace and soften up dramatic stereotypes and narrative conventions that has damaged the commercial cinema more extensively than even the dissolution of the star system or the break-up of the studio-controlled product, because it has fragmented the formal coherence of the realistic style, mixing indiscriminately subjective and objective points of view, losing thus the ability of developing a secondary discourse within the narrative itself.

The coherence of a culture or a subculture within a culture (such as the cinema) is the extent to which it can impose paradigms, give models of behaviour and response which are accepted as true. Where such a coherence is in evidence, I think one can make a meaningful correlation between artistic style and ideology. As far as the classic American cinema was concerned, this was by no means always a homological or parallel one — a fact which ultimately gives it a claim to serious aesthetic consideration.

In Britain, precisely because its cinema lacks (with few exceptions) strong directorial personalities, and has never developed a specifically cinematic mise-en-scene, the correlation is on the level of themes and subjects, which gives a socio-ideological critique of the kind Raymond Durgnat is interested its validity, but by the same token, makes it far less rewarding from the aesthetic perspective, because the level of coherence is constituted by an extra-cinematic system (the hypothetical 'consensus' or 'middle-class values') brought into the films from outside in order to make them 'legible', and not by a cinematic specificity and a formal coherence controlling the aesthetic means by which ideological contents are reflected, transformed or critically expressed within a film. What is so rare in the British cinema in other words, is a film where the subject is undercut by the style, and the story subverted by the point of view from which it is narrated. Style and ideology are undoubtedly correlated, but the important queston from an evaluative position is which determines the primary articulation. Lacking this primary articulation on the level of style, the British cinema has, in the majority of its films, remained ideologically transparent and artistically second rate.

'The medium is the message' goes MacLuhan's catch-phrase. For the cinema one might interpret this as the primacy of 'style' — whether personal or collective — over subject and ideological content. The rapid decline in recent years of the conventional norms by which a recognizable plot-structure and a rigorously 'realistic' diction secured a primary level of formal unity (which gave the notion of style its 'auteur theory' meaning of an independent point of view visually realized within the objective fiction), has exposed cinematic syntax to theoretical and practical scrutiny, and put the onus on the indiidual film-maker to choose and realize his own system of coherence — which in an age of multiple artistic idioms, a convergence of media, and the loss of a binding view of (social) reality, often means a meta-style imposing itself on a subject — at the price of making it 'difficult'. Conversely, it means, as in the case of the classical directors, a limitation of the range of subjects in favour of stylistic purty and coherence. These seem the only ways in which images can preserve their ability to make a valid artistic statement. Images, like words, where they are not part of a defined, or self-defining discourse, are demagogic. Furthermore, their proliferation has made certain types or combinations useless for anything other than the transmission of clichés. The metaphoric quality of film, its power to create associations between disparate objects, for example, has been systematically exploited by advertising to the point of virtually destroying the possibilities of metaphoric discourse. What showed up Anderson's limitations as a film-maker perhaps more than anything else was that when in **If...** he wanted to express the idea of freedom and youthful vitality he shot a sequence which looks like an advertisement for Honda motorbikes. And this is because Honda motorbikes are

Putting across some points (Ken Loach's **Family Life**)

sold on the ticket of freedom and youthful vitality. Signifier and signified, image and idea, have either become stereotyped into fetishist fixations or have totally parted company and are freely negotiable and convertible — each drawing meaning from the other, but less and less meaningful in themselves, like international currencies on the stock-exchange. The Hollywood style has suffered the same fate as the dollar — one can't draw on it as a reserve anymore.

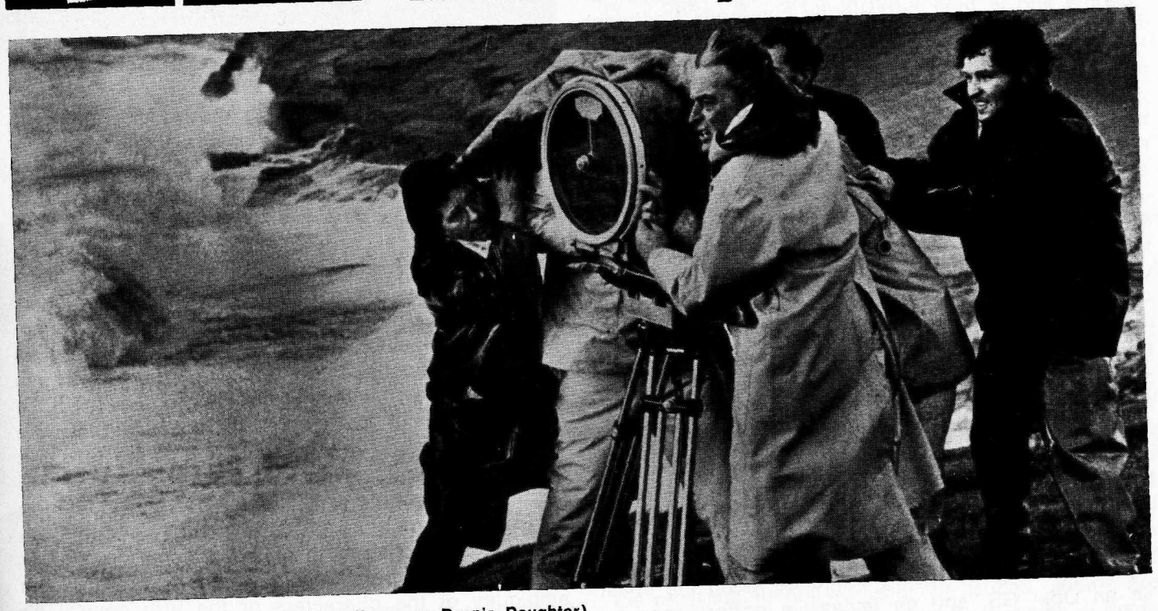
The chances are remote that within our present society the cinema will again develop a collective style. Just as in writing the gap between journalism and literature has become wider and wider since the second half of the nineteenth century, one can predict a similar separation between television, advertising and other primarily informative uses of cinematic images, and the cinema as an art, with a cognitive potential. It seems certain that only a coherently realized point of view will give the visual density needed to transcend the level of simple ideology, and only a specific style can inflect the meaningless flux of images assailing us towards any kind of significance. In Britain, very few directors show an awareness of the problematic relation between style and meaning in the modern cinema. As far as one can see, only the work of Losey is there to prove that Britain, too, has its avant-garde film-maker.

1 British feature film production, according to the figures supplied by the Board of Trade, averaged about 72 films a year between 1960 and 1969. With the accelerated withdrawal of American capital since 1969 there has been a perceptible drop in production. Only 67 feature films were made in Britain in 1970.
2 *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1956
3 'Standing Up for Jesus', *Motion* no. 6, 1963
4 quoted in Raymond Durgnat, *A Mirror for England*, p. 2 and Ian Johnson, 'The Decade in Britain', *Films and Filming*, Sept. '62
5 see Peter Graham, 'The Loneliness of a Long-Distance Runner', subtitled 'Why are good British films so bad' *Motion* pamphlet, 1963.
6 *Evening Standard*, February 25, 1971 (quoted by Kevin Glover in an as yet unpublished article).

The British Cinema.
2

The hazards of insularity

Jean Paul Török



Great events rolling back to Ireland (Lean on **Ryan's Daughter**)

With the British cinema, as with any other cinema, it has now become impossible to speak accurately of a national production. The erosion of national identity, largely the result of the atomization of Hollywood, has affected the British cinema more seriously than any other. International economic interpenetration will perhaps only affect the French and Italian cinema indirectly or in the distant future, but it has immediate repercussions on the British cinema, directly threatening the national individuality. Unlike the American cinema which always remained wide open to outside contributors and was largely cosmopolitan in character, the history of the British cinema shows that its survival hinges on it being economically independent, and that it perishes when cut off from its national roots. It is, bar a few exceptions, neither a cinema of 'auteurs' nor of 'metteurs-en-scène', and its originality is based entirely on the patricular qualities associated with its insularity — a rule which seems largely valid throughout its history. National production was never more prosperous than during the hayday of the great Rank and Korda empires, and when one reflects that throughout its development the British cinema has always been involved in a continual struggle with its American rival, nothing would be sadder than to see the Americans win the battle, only to drag the British down with them in their ruin.

In fact, the connection between the British and the American cinema is at present so close that it is only by means of arbitrary criteria and subjective opinions that they can be distinguished from each other. The injection of American capital into the industry has been so massive that the notion of a 'British film' in the way this was understood a decade ago has almost disappeared. To opt for the country of origin of the director is of little help, for the films of John Schlesinger, Peter Yates and John Boorman made on the other side of the Atlantic are pure American products. A film like **Leo the Last,** even though shot in London, seems as cosmopolitan and myth-making as Antonioni's **Blow Up.** In this the careers of the young English directors resemble quite closely the caeers of their elders. The generation that came to the fore in the sixties pointed to the same tendency for talent to be dispersed as the industry disintegrated — a process which has set in motion by the liquidation of British Lion in 1963, and which was similar to what happened after the crisis of 1949 and the collapse of the Rank organization.

But while the americanization of superproduction specialists like J Lee Thompson and Michael Anderson was quite radical, it had less effect on directors like Anthony Asquith and Carol Reed who were more firmly rooted in the national tradition. Carol Reed, his reputation boosted by the commercial success of **Oliver** tried his hand at directing an American production, **The Last Warrior,** based on a story by Claire Huffaker which could have done with a more concrete and vigorous treatment. This story of a pathetic tribe of Indians shut up in a reservation in the middle of nowhere deserved something better than the facile crane shots it received. The subject seems artificial mainly because based on a humour/drama dichotomy which clearly does not suit Reed's talent. The heritage of the old style British cinema shows through in the picturesque characterization of people and in their persistently humorous treatment which recalls the Ealing comedies. The story of a newly discovered treaty guaranteeing the Indian community the right to a large slice of territory — including one of the main cities of the state bears too close a resemblance to **Passport to Pimlico** for one not to notice it. Whether intentionally or not, the transposition is quite amusing and gives rise to two or three scenes which have a more subversive meaning than is at first apparent, for example the re-routing of a highway and the capture of a railway convoy, until the point where the film veers towards drama and political parable, and Carol Reed's irresponsibility becomes too blatant for words. And yet, it is more readily excusable than the incurable laziness of a Terence Young, a perfect example of the polymorphic and characterless British director. He has ended up making films which no longer even have the virtue of being 'insular', an attractive quality in the James Bond films which he now appears to deprecate. **The Night Visitors** is a spineless Franco-Italian co-production with scarcely anything worth remembering in it apart from a good racing sequence along the coast in an Opel GS, and an impassive performance by James Mason who stoically bleeds to death during almost an hour in the film. It would however be unfair to damn the maker of **Corridor of Mirrors,** for he is still capable of creating a surprise provided he has a sufficiently bizarre script (cf. **Valley of the Eagles, Zarak, Dr. No** and even **Wait until Dark**).

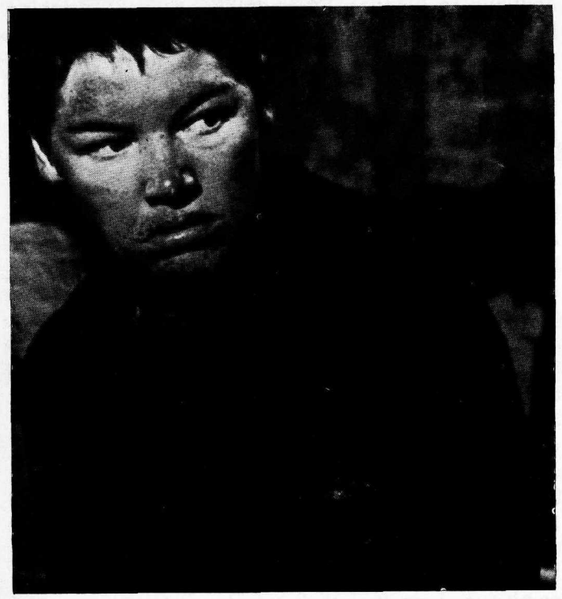
2.

As early as the thirties Alexander Korda stated that "the people who make the best national films are always foreigners". The words of this charmingly cosmopolitan Hungarian who, having made England his adopted home and become a personal friend of Churchill, produced a whole series of films to the glory of the Empire, seem to foreshadow the success of his near-compatriot Billy Wilder whose **Sherlock Holmes** appears the most accomplished and sophisticated British production of recent years. The only work which I think can stand comparison with Wilder's in this respect are the films of David Lean and Ronald Neame. **Ryan's Daughter** and **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie** are works of unquestionable originality — i.e. they have a definite sense of origin — in spite of (and also because of) their outmoded form and their astonishingly academic style. This conservatism is not surprising considering that both directors were moulded by Noël Coward in the old days of the Cine Guild which together with Ealing Studios was the most enterprising and creative production unit of the Rank organization.

The accusation of British film makers being academic while their colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic are praised for their 'classicism' is wide open to criticism. Ronald Neame is taken to be, like so many others, an able technician, but insipid and with no individual style. Yet a glance at his filmography (which comprises only fifteen films) shows that he was responsible for three of the best comedies of the fifties, **The Card, Man With A Million** and **The Horse's Mouth,** the first two, adaptations from Arnold Bennett and Mark Twain, being at least as good as the best Ealing productions, while the third comes close to being a masterpiece. Neame also directed a brave and remarkably lucid anti-colonialist film (**Windom's Way**) at a time when this was an uncommon subject to deal with. In addition, he made a well-seasoned military satire (**Tunes of Glory**) and more recently **Gambit** which is a clever renewal of the theme of the perfect hold-up. He is perhaps not a 'metteur-en-scene' in the most autocratic sense of the term, but he deserves to be respected for his expert choice of scripts, the effectiveness of his scenarios and his skilful direction of actors. These are all qualities present in **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,** where the formal restraint belies the immodesties of the subject without thereby changing its scabrous implications. It is a fact that there is always a good script-writer behind the most polished British productions, and in the case of **Miss Jean Brodie** much of the credit for the subtleties of the resulting film must go to Jay Presson Allen (who already had the script for **Marnie** to her credit) for her adaptation of Muriel Spark's novel. This is not to deny the shrewdness and strength of the director's work, for instance, the expert way in which he conveys the ambiguity of the characters or the firm control he exerts over the development of the delicately balanced plot. His 'thirties' heroine had to be both likeable and odious, ridiculous and slightly frightening, oldfashioned and yet plausibly contemporary. The tedium of life in a Scottish boarding school had to be conveyed, a parable on hypnotic fascination and fascism be sketched, equivocal sexual entanglements be concisely described. Maggie Smith is superb in the role of the 'revolutionary' teacher enamoured of Art and Beauty, preaching to her young pupils the ideal of free love, the delights of eroticism, and by an odd twist in her thought, the exotic splendour of Mussolini's regime. The film finely portrays her psychopathic behaviour and the morbid hold she exercises over the minds of her girls, and this in spite of a slightly theatrical style which fortunately disappears in the dénouement, an ending that avoids moral indignation in favour of a truly Jamesean ambiguity.

3.

Perhaps the feeling of disappointment in this article results from not being able to answer unequivocally the question 'which director is most representative of the post-war British cinema?'. Leaving aside the Free Cinema generation, none of whom has yet shown himself superior to the others (I consider Karel Reisz



A quite frightening appetite for ugliness **(The Music Lovers)**

to be slightly in the lead since **Isadora,** but he is just as liable to disappoint us as Anderson is to surprise us), David Lean seems the only possible candidate, even though one has to add a qualifying 'alas!'. Since starting to make films based on spectacular subjects which give scope to his talents as supertechnician, the name of David Lean has entered, if not the good books of the critics, at least into the history of the cinema with his really imposing **Lawrence of Arabia.** The film left one wondering what to admire more, the extravagance of the means or the masterly control over his grandiose material, an oriental chaos fittingly embodying the imagination of a mythomaniac and mysterious adventurer.

Even in such a disaster as **Dr. Zhivago** there were some splendid things, flashes of sequences which could not conceivably have been imagined with more daring megalomania by anyone else since the great Americans. As for **Ryan's Daughter,** it is common knowledge that Lean and his script-writer Robert Bolt, unable to find a sufficiently magnificent subject, decided to create one themselves, by drawing on the ideal landscapes of their imagination, and fusing into one vast totality the infinite backdrop of the Ocean, the wild heaths and the shores as far as the eye can reach, the horizon beyond which great historic events unfold and come rolling back to Ireland. To insert in this monumental panorama an intimate little love story, give it a luxurious surface like the flamboyant façade on some piece of romantic architecture, elevate hidden passions to cataclysmic and tempestuous proportions, in short, to use millions of dollars to transform a banal tale of adultery into a turbulent super-spectacular was a gamble which compels respect if only for being so disarmingly naive in its intentions and unique in its formula. In fact, there is nothing quite like this gigantic and garish film, and its merit springs as much from its exceptional character as from anything else. If one follows film by film the itinerary which led David Lean from the mournful little suburban tune of **Brief Encounter** to this cosmic orchestration of feelings, one realizes that he is only remaining faithful to the Coward themes of adultery, chance meetings and impossible love. The film in fact embodies a typically British conception of romanticism in the way it tends to see the return to conformity as an expiatory sublimation of the urge for adventure. One can measure the distance Lean has travelled in a quarter of a century right from the chaste idyll between Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson up to the open sexuality in the relationship between Sarah Miles and Christopher Jones, unless Lean wasn't also in this respect concerned to find spectacular aspects in keeping with the rest. The film is brimming over with such amazing scenes that it is absolutely impossible to tell whether they are genuinely inspired or simply try to pass themselves off as such. The storm is undeniably the finest bravura piece the British cinema has given us since Flaherty's **Man of Aran.** It is true that some of the credit must doubtless go to the director of the second unit, Charles Frend, who was trained in the war documentary unit at Ealing and is a specialist in films with a maritime interest (**San Demetrio – London, The Cruel Sea**). Finally, there remains the sequence where Christopher Jones commits suicide, which gives a good idea of the tone of the film: against the background of an ocean sunset — the most beautiful sunset in the world filmed by the greatest specialist in sunsets, Freddie Young — Christopher Jones is playing carelessly with a detonator in the middle of a vast ammunition dump and blows himself up at precisely the moment when the sun disappears over the horizon. It could either be sublime or ridiculous and it succeeds in being both.

Although **Murphy's War** was shot by an Englishman, it is an undeniably American film, while **The Last Valley,** made by an American, fits well the description of 'insular'. But is it really necessary to go into these incidental details of production? After all, some of the most significant works of the British cinema are films shot in the United States by Englishmen or made in Britain by Americans. There will always be a confusion over this as long as Britain does not have financial control of her own cinema.

Peter Yates is a director nostalgic about Hollywood. Who could have guessed that he was Richardson's assistant at the time of **A Taste of Honey**? His first film, **Summer Holiday** was a musical comedy in the Associated British tradition, with mediocre choreography but dashed off in a spirited improvised manner. After doing a variation the 'hold-up of the century' theme (**Robbery**), he established his reputation as a virtuoso with the superbly timed chase in **Bullitt,** before surrendering to fashion and making the cosily sentimental **John and Mary** (a premature version of **Love Story**). **Murphy's War** sums up his qualities as a director. Anything to do with spectacular action is well organized, and he also conveys a critical intention in a manner which is clear without being blatant. Silliphant's script is a fine homage to Huston, and he is even more caustic than Huston about the myth of adventure. He puts us on our guard against the type of hero he is showing, but direction and acting are conventional and so miss the point, which makes the result rather ambiguous. It would be difficult to have it otherwise within the

abstract framework of pure action. The battle between the flying-boat and the submarine is a good bravura piece, but it is not until the last ten minutes of the film that one gets a feeling of oppressiveness, when the unease intended by the authors is physically communicated. It is a pity that one has to wait so long.

British superproductions (the tradition stretches back to the sprawling vehicles of Korda's days) are almost unequalled in the vast ambitions of their projects and their no less frequent failure to mitigate their pomposity. What was once only a competitive strategy when the sophisticated resources of the national studios were used to outdo the great Hollywood spectaculars (Rank promoted their most expensive productions, from **Caesar and Cleopatra** to **Saraband for Dead Lovers,** by playing on their 'intellectual quality') is now in the present-day cinema a cause for astonishment. Far from vacillating or stooping to the masses of television viewers, the superproductions do not simply contend themselves with carrying on in their role of preserving traditional forms in the face of the faltering efforts of the 'young cinema'. They supplement their visual plethora by an emphasis on the content, whether it be the great romantic dioramas of Lean or the erudite and thought-out historical frescoes like **Becket** or **Cromwell.** A recent, very extravagant Anglo-American production by ABC, James Clavell's **The Last Valley,** makes an all-out play for hyperbole, politico-philosophical allegory and even theological speculation. The dialogue is as over-elaborate and high-flown as in Sidney Pollack's memorable **Castle Keep,** the whole apocalyptic background being topped by similarly grandiose contemporary metaphors. Bearing in mind the crushing aesthetic of the genre, Clavell has done rather well. But can one seriously debate the originality of the underlying intention? It struck me — although I would not swear by it — that it was set on non-humanist co-ordinates aiming at something rather different from Anglo-saxon liberalism. It is definitely agnostic and possibly atheistic. For my own part, I would see in the obscure and farfetched portrait of this 'last' valley, an outpost of civilization surrounded by the European pandemonium of the Thirty Years' War, a metaphor more critical than is apparent on the old myth of insularity — 'this other Eden, demi-paradise; this fortress built by Nature for herself, against infection and the hand of war . . . this realm, this England.' It would have called for more ample development if the 'message' was not to get lost in the academic style of the direction (superb, if one likes this kind of thing), thereby aggravating the misunderstanding as well as one's perplexity.

5.

Nothing could be more trivial than a film like **Performance,** a good example of scandalously commercial production-line cinema which could just as well have been made in Paris, New York or Copenhagen. A film like this seems to demonstrate that the British cinema liberated itself from the ideological yoke of the middle class (which at least gave it its rare anachronism and the charm of the 'good old days') only to be corrupted by a ravenous modernism catering for snobs and progressives at all cost. Drugs, pop music, group sex and androgynism are the sum total of the liberty allowed in a country whose institutions continue to function as smoothly as ever. Watching Donald Cammel's film one is only given a complaisant view of permissiveness, while in fact, more than anywhere else, class still governs the behaviour of the individual in Britain. This is what directors like Ken Loach and Platts-Mills, following in the tradition of semi-documentary and Free Cinema, try to present by rendering a social setting with exactitude. Ted Kotcheff would have come closer to realizing this aim in his commendable **Two Gentlemen Sharing,** if he had not ended up, because of the hazy conception and the awkwardness of the execution, with a series of half-truths which travesty his serious intentions. The script by Evan Jones, a former collaborator of Losey (**Eve, King and Country**), provided an unusual and ingenious starting point. The incisive basis of the drama about the life together of two fine specimen of British civilization who set out to attack the notions of elegance, education and refinement (one of them being coloured, although educated at Oxford) could have led to a caustic comedy on the subject of racial integration and indeed, it is almost successful at the beginning. The fault of what follows is that it is too ambitious, even though it remains a fascinating film on the level of intentions. To deal with the sexual implications of racialism and move from the observation of mores to a confrontation between class notions of behaviour would have needed as much political as cinematic mastery of the material, and both are sadly lacking. What remains is an interesting reportage on the life of West Indians in London, including a noteworthy semi-documentary reggae sequence — ten minutes which capture the reality of the people with a rare precision.

6.

One can gauge how far the British cinema has come over the past dozen years by the distance which separates the chief engineer of the abortive renaissance at the end of the fifties from the most prominent and bright representative of the new generation today. **Ned Kelly** is evidence of Tony Richardson's inability to revitalize — even in nineteenth century Australia, even with Mick Jagger — the now dated rebellion of the Angry Young Men. With **The Music Lovers** following after **Women in Love** Ken Russell on the other hand seems intent on demolishing whole centuries of decorum and puritanism. Richardson resigns himself to a classicism which is simply disenchantment, while Russell has invented for himself a riotous and violent style to express his irreverence and iconoclastic rage. He lashes out against romanticism, against women and against the beauty he creates only to destroy it the more furiously. He has something osbcure and pathological about him, a quite frightening appetite for ugliness linked to a sort of vague adoration for white-robed silhouettes slipping through the undergrowth. His hate of romanticism is curious — or is it only the reverse of his fixation? — for he loves doing the most beautiful clichés. His obsessions match his talent and he parades them with superb unconcern, indifferent to the disgust they arouse. Both his freedom of expression and his visual excesses are unparalleled in the British cinema. He may yet give it what it has always lacked: formal audacity and a search for style.

translated by Kay Gladstone

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The British Cinema. 3

Carry on sinking

Chris Mottershead

The high level of unemployment among film-technicians, the closure last year of MGM's studios at Boreham Wood, the withdrawal of American finance which had accounted for 90% of British film production in 1969 and the rapid rise and fall of Bryan Forbes as the Head of Production for ABPC are all symptoms of the current crisis in the British Film Industry. What is difficult to decide is if this crisis is exceptional or just one of the series which appear to have dogged the British industry since its birth, making it hard to tell whether the industry's disease is operable or incurable.

In 1926 after the set-back the industry suffered during the First World War and the Americans' capture of much of the European market, British films occupied only 5% of the screen time in this country. In 1932 American films took five million pounds a year from Britain whilst British films only brought in one hundred thousand pounds from America in return. In 1936/7 there was a national production crisis partly as a hang-over from the Depression and in 1941 the two major chains of Gaumont and Odeon Cinemas were put under the same management. Thus the British industry followed a much more irregular pattern of growth than its American counterpart in the pre-war period.

The halcyon forties for the American cinema were the years when many of the diculties of the Britsh industry became more apparent still. The imposition of the Dalton Duties, a 75% tax on American films imported into Britain at a moment when American had 80% of the British market, resulted in an American embargo on distribution to Britain. The Rank Organisation, which had been trying rather unsuccessfully to export films to America in the immediate post-war years, now made plans to produce some sixty feature films in an effort, together with other British producers, to fill the gap made by the stoppage of American films. In 1948 the British Government came to a compromise with the American industry, setting up a new quota system in return for the withdrawal of the import tax, and as a result the American embargo was lifted. At the very moment when the British production made under these conditions of a forced and hurried expansion reached the screens of the nation, the best of two year's American production arrived in Britain. The native productions could not compete, and in 1948 Rank lost about three-and-a-half million pounds and British Lion some two-and-a-quarter million. The Rank Organisation had its other assets to cushion the loss but British Lion began its slide into bankruptcy. Significantly the Rank Organisation has not ventured into any extensive programme of production since this period.

The eventual fall of British Lion absorbed much of the £5 million which the Government put into its new National Film Finance Corporation set up in 1948 as a self-liquidating fund to aid film producers, for Korda's company was loaned £3 million of it, all of which was eventually lost. It may have been that the sum itself was of scant use in curing the production problems of the industry at that time. This was the view of Nicholas Davenport who resigned from the NFFC in 1949. In a *Daily Mail* article in July, he pointed out the relevant financial details of the previous year:

£112,000,000 Box Office Receipts.
£38,000,000 Entertainment Tax.
£50,000,000 Exhibitors.
£6,000,000 Distributors.

leaving

£19,000,000 of which
£12,000,000 was the American share.
£7,000,000 was the British share.

Yet British films for that year had cost £14 million to produce and had earned only £2 m in exports and so had lost £5 m. Davenport later argued in a *New* Statesman' article in 1951 that what the Government should have done was to nationalise British Lion, having lent it so much money, to have used its studios for more independent productions and then to have arranged cheaper distribution facilities and possibly to have moved against the nation-wide booking power of the big circuits. What the Government actually did, he explained, was to lend money to British Lion without controlling it, fail to set up any worthwhile producers with sufficient backing but instead to spend a considerable amount of money on second-feature films which cost too much and finally allow the NFFC to become closely involved with Rank and ABC in 1951.

It can be said though, that since its almost forced involvement with 'British Lion', the NFFC has in fact played an essential role within Britain by providing 'end-money' for many productions which would otherwise never have been made, for this money was the least likely to be regained from a production since it had last call on possible profits. The Corporation was involved in the production of more than seven hundred features between 1949 and 1970 and lost only some £2m out of an investment of £27m, if the loan to British Lion is discounted. Such a performance must be regarded as successful within its own terms, since the NFFC has always been bound to try to operate commercially and in such a high-risk financial area.

The fifties saw the increasing decline of cinema audiences, the closure of cinemas, especially as a result of the merger and rationalisation of the Gaumont and Odeon chains by Rank in 1958, and a further fall in production because of this loss of cinema outlets for new films. Protests about the lack of distribution possibilities for independent films led to the setting up of the Monopolies Commission which reported in 1966. The Report pointed out the drop in production of long films (over 72 mins) from peak of 96 in 1957 to 69 in 1965 and of short films (33⅓ — 72 mins) from 45 to 28 in 1960 and and only 22 in 1965. It found that a film needed a booking on one of the two major circuits for any hope of success and that distributors were unwilling to show a film unless they could get such a booking. The fact that the cinemas of both chains were large resulted in a policy of booking only films which would have a mass appeal and therefore denying minority films any outlet. The Commission concluded that:

'. . . production is effectively determined by the policies of only two companies without the check of competition. Admittedly we have no reason to think that they do not act conscientiously and seek to meet what they believe to be the public demand. But the public's taste cannot be anticipated, and we believe that the public would be better served by a freer market.' (par. 230)

The Commission could recommend little beyond asking the two circuits to give assurances that they would be more flexible in their pattern of booking in future.

In the sixties, production received the

impetus of greater American finance, drawn amongst other reasons by the lower production costs in Britain than in America, but much of this money seems to have been halted by the current recession in the American economy.

The recent history of production in Britain seems to have been greatly influenced by the changes in the American industry, especially by the run-down of studios by the major companies and their concentration more on distribution and on leasing studios to independent producers than on making a continuous series of their own films. Lower costs in England, together with the absence of language problems, were among factors which attracted American money in the sixties but this supply now seems to have contracted, perhaps because many of the major companies have suffered changes of management whereby they have been absorbed by organisations with wider interests who operate on more conventional business bases. When a long-established film giant like 20th Century Fox can lose more than £50 million in the past two years it may be that nobody is safe.

In so far as the Government has intervened in the affairs of the industry, since the last war, it appears that the abolition of the Entertainment Tax, the setting up of the NFFC and the introduction of Eady Money have acted as some encouragement to producers to continue working in Britain in order to keep film workers employed, and possibly also to prevent the need to import all the films shown by such encouragement. Such a policy could be called one of minimum intervention in the workings of the industry. If the Government had at any time since the war really desired to foster the industry, however, it ought to have considered the structure of the industry much more closely. Failure to do this led to the embarrassment of 1947/48 when the capabilities of the industry were grossly over-rated. Failure to appreciate the implications of the growing control over the circuits by the two major companies made it difficult or impossible to stimulate independent Brtish production later on.

As more cinemas were closed, the demand for feature films became less, since the pattern of the two major chains was to retain a limited numbe of feature films for widespread showing in order to get maximum value from current publicity — thus the two chains may well show one film in all of their respective cinemas north of the river one week, followed by a showing of the same film in all their cinemas south of the river the following week.

At the time of the Rank rationalisation, American companies already supplied about seventy films per year, and Michael Balcon points out in *A Lifetime of Films* that American finance in companies with which the two major chains were associated effectively controlled much of the production of the remaining thirty odd films required to complete the circuits' programmes. Thus the closures meant a contraction in the annual demand for films of almost one third and it was in this area that the likely chances for independent productions had previously existed.

It could be argued that the hold exercised over production by the two major chains was no bad thing in a contracting industry provided that they supplied the public with what it wanted. Yet of the thirty-nine most popular British-made films in the years 1957–62, twenty eight were independently produced. Balcon stresses that films have to be financed on a revolving fund, whereby future credit is based on the returns from films already made. Because of the number of cinemas owned by the two major chains or associated with them, distributors are reluctant to handle a film unless it can obtain a booking with the major chains, and are prepared to hold a film for some time until such a booking is available. Yet all the time that the film is on the shelf waiting to be shown it is building up heavy interest charges on the money borrowed to produce it, whilst the lack of any direct returns prevents the producers from embarking on future work. In May 1970 it is estimated that about one hundred feature films were waiting for a showing.

Hopes for any form of stronger Government intervention in the industry seem scant when the present Government has recently decided to reverse the decision of its predecessor in funding the NFFC with a further £5 million; instead the NFFC has now virtually to depend on raising capital from private sources if it is to continue. Such a withdrawal of Government interest is at the opposite pole from the position of the ACTT, the union most involved on the technical production of films in Britain, which has put forward a policy of nationalising part of the industry to form a state corporation with production, distribution and exhibition facilities.

Certainly without the help provided by the NFFC and perhaps more importantly by the British Film Fund during the fifties and sixties, Independent production would have been hard hit. The British Film Fund, or 'Eady Money', was introduced in 1950, financed by a levy on cinema seats for all films shown in Britain. The money raised by this levy was then to be redistributed to British films proportional to their box office returns, whereby successful films would draw greater subsidy, presumably in the hope of promoting future commercial successes. Since the amount of Eady Money often equals what would be the distributors' commission and expenses, usually a minimum of 25% of takings, it may well make the difference between outright profit or loss for a producer. Yet the system has benefited American producers as much possibly as English ones, for provided a large proportion of the labour cost goes to British crews the film will qualify for Eady Money even though its capital may come from America or elsewhere.

So far, attention has been directed to the structure of the industry, but clearly other and more imponderable factors than economics are involved in the way in which film production in Britain has developed, determinants such as cultural patterns, the possible availability of talent and the methods of production.

Whatever the relative importance in the development of the industry of such factors, however, it is clear that the film industry is changing internationally today, and nowhere more so than in America, where the producton side of the major companies seems to have been dropped in favour of their distribution interests, with the companies reliant upon independent package deals to provide them with films. Cost is no longer proportional to success, if it ever was, for a popular success such as **Paint Your Waggon** is unlikely to produce a profit, whereas **Woodstock** cost several hundred thousand dollars but has grossed thirty or forty times its cost. In the face of changing demand, the British Industry still seems very uncertain as to how it will react.

The monolithic system of distribution and exhibition is undoubtedly the major stumbling block to flexibility because of its presumption of the old unitary mass audience, with the consequent denial of any range of choice for viewers. If independent production is to flourish it may need to invest less, because of the risks, and to be sure of a swift, if modest, return, which the present system of 'all or nothing' distribution cannot provide for more than a few films. Possible new commercial ways of financing films are outlined in an article in 'Investors Chronicle' for August 6th 1971, including a possible major review of the whole distribution with Eady money, international and tv rights whereby revenues might be pooled and divided in such a way as to ensure that all parties made at least some money from the moment that a film begins to be shown. Other sources of finance might be from money currently spent on advertising, or from companies who hope to break free from the patterns of lavish spending historically associated with the film industry by dispensing with such things as expensive publicity or West End showings. Paradoxically though, one of the problems of 'selling' a film appears to be the reliance the general public still attaches to a West End showing as some sort of seal of approval.

More radical solutions favour the creation of independent cinemas, direct distrbuton by the film makers or some similar pattern for taking films to their intended audience. As an 'alternative solution' such schemes may well have small-scale success but if they were to aim at reaching a large audience, then presumably some sizeable organisation would have to be created, even if it were not aimed at profit-making beyond covering costs.

What remains to be seen however is if the commercial industry does prove willing to become more flexible — will there be the talent for film making waiting to emerge in Britain.

The Go-Between

The Go-Between. GB 1971 *Dir* Joseph Losey *Sc* Harold Pinter, after *The Go-Between* by L P Hartley *Phot* Gerry Fischer *Mus* Michel Legrand *Cast* Julie Christie (Marian) Alan Bates (Ted Burgess) Margaret Leighton (Mrs Maudsley) Dominic Guard (Leo) Edward Fox (Hugh Trimingham) Michael Gough (Mr Maudsley) Michael Redgrave (Colston) *Prod* MGM-EMI (116 min)

Experience teaches that to live with any degree of awareness means to choose, and to assume resposibility for one's choices. But contrary to what pragmatic empiricism upholds, one chooses not individual acts or beliefs to act upon, but with them larger contexts in which these acts inscribe themselves, and whether one likes it or not, it is the way such contexts constitute themselves into objective systems that gives the choices their meaning. It may take a lifetime to find out just what the exact lines of force are in the systems to which one has committed oneself. And where a moral or intellectual commitment has supplanted the spontaneous re-enacting of prejudices handed down by one's education, personal identity can become a tightrope, held taut by the past and strung out into the future. On such a tightrope Leo Colston, the narrator of **The Go-Between** seems to be walking.

Losey, in a good many of his films likes to draw the lesson that spontaneity is often not the exercise of freedom, but simply the painful ignorance about the deeper emotional and social determinants which generate their own dynamics of creativity and obsession within the individual. Films like **M, Time Without Pity, Blind Date** or **King and Country** are concerned with the way a man unwittingly, and yet in retrospect necessarily, entangles himself in different social and private worlds which seem at first to have nothing to do with him, but nonetheless fatally exhaust his strength or destroy his life. Throughout his work, furthermore, Losey has been interested in the worlds within worlds, and his later films trace the properly ideological fabric into which a subjective intelligence is woven. Inevitably, once aware of itself between these worlds, this intelligence experiences life as exile.

From the opening shot, with Colston's voice over saying 'the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there', **The Go-Between** (as the title suggests) makes the coexistence of different worlds and the sense of being exiled its dominant theme. The ostensible subject — taken from the L P Hartley novel — is the loss or spontaneity and innocence through an act of adult selfishness. Leo, a sensitive and intelligent boy of thirteen becomes the accomplice in the desperate and therefore ruthless love-affair between Marian, daughter of a Norfolk country gentleman and Ted, the robust farmer who works part of the Maudsley estate. In love with Marian himself, Leo consents to being their messenger boy, but in the event he has to cmpromise the Maudsleys whose guest he is and betray the lovers. The double breach of loyalty, as much as the confrontation with the sexual act under 'archetypal' circumstances (the couple are in some ways Leo's substitute parents) has a traumatizing effect, and in the inserted flash-forward scenes Leo appears as a stiff, reserved bachelor visiting the 'country of the past' at Marian's request.

Several aspects must have attracted Losey to the subject. There is the theme of instrusion: Leo is a visitor at Brandham Hall rather like Anna is a visitor at Oxford in **Accident.** Both introduce a new element into a network of human relationships which respond to this intrusion, in both films to produce fatal results. One remembers the Dirk Bogarde figure in **The Sleeping Tiger** or Robert Mitchum's role in **Secret Ceremony,** and one realizes how much the visitor as intruder has been a constant feature in Losey's work, already present before he collaborated with Pinter (who prefers similar patterns, e.g. **The Caretaker, The Homecoming**). It is furthermore a theme that links Losey with one of the chief dramatic devices of Hollywood, where the solitary outsider so often is the dynamic agent whose intervention forced the community to reveal itself.

In **The Go-Between,** however, the emphasis is not so much on the way the intruder accelerates or catalyzes by his presence the natural momentum of the configuration, he appears more as the reflective recipient (not to say victim) of the different stages in the equilibrium and disequilibrium of the Maudsley household, which is going through a latent crisis. From the moment Marian takes Leo to Norwich, he is being used, manipulated, a pawn in a game he is unable to comprehend. The crisis is primarily an emotional one (Marian is forced to marry a man she does not love), but Losey defines it also in terms of a class-conflict and a clash of life-styles. Beneath the domestic crisis we sense an imminent historical change: by taking literally the metaphor of the 'Edwardian summer' which came to an end in 1914, Losey revitalizes the cliché with a more directly thematic symbolism. Also, the characters talk about war and mean the Boer war but the audience readily associates World War One. 'Do you think this is the end of the summer?' Leo asks Marian on the morning of his birthday as the storm-clouds draw up, and it is as if since that day the rainy season had never stopped for Colston.

Because it is conceived as a sustained reminiscence punctuated by flash-forwards in which a Biblical wind bloweth where it listeth, the film quite naturally amplifies the portrait of a historical period and a social class with the subjective dimension of an individual consciousness, recalling a particularly painful

and vivid childhood experience. The narrative form thus directly suggests the subjective-objective nexus in which the story is cast (an important change from book to film), and in order to mark the peculiar intensity of memory Losey constantly uses the evidence of a hot summer to play on the ambiguities of light, heat and brilliance. ('You flew too near the sun and you got scorched' the narrator comments as Leo is sitting next to Marian on the coach to Norwich).

In one sense, Leo's presence is an intrusion into an essentially closed world provoking it to make explicit its behaviour, attitudes, and self-understanding. Subjectively, however, it is also an initiation — another Losey theme since **The Boy With the Green Hair, The Big Night** up to **Figures in a Landscape.** Leo undergoes a threefold rite of passage into the adult world: a different social milieu (the middle class boy getting his first taste of upper class mores as he is ceremoniously led to the dinner table by the hostess), a new emotional awareness (the feeling of love and the secrets of sex), and entry into a world of moral ambiguity about right and wrong, and the mental anguish of conflicting loyalties.

On a dramatic level, the double movement of intrusion and initiation provides the inner dialectic of the film, and the subjective-objective 'polarity' (which is a unity on a deeper level) articulates the inividual parts into a consecutive narrative flow. The introductory prologue illustrates this very well. Leo is led into the house and up the stairs to his friend's room, but at every opportunity he looks out of the window onto the lawn, the croquet game, he glimpses Marian in her hammock, or sees the father waving to them from the park. To penetrate into Brandham Hall is literally and metaphorically to have different vantage points from which to observe other worlds outside, and the scene is constructed in such a way that there is an immediate sense of inner complexity (the angles at which the interior, the staircase, the landings are framed) offset by the seemingly idyllic vistas leading the eye to project itself beyond — a thematic conjunction of distance and desire, proximity and emotional turmoil. which the film develops in the direction of a dualism between the need to belong and the awareness of being excluded, in short, the dilemma -that the voyeur shares with the exile.

The movement is continued when the boys leave the house to go into the garden, for here one has an 'objective' view of Leo, the boys in the middle distance, Marian in the foreground, with the sense of instrusion conveyed by the voice over (one of Marian's admirers) reading to her from a novel and suddenly interrupting himself to ask 'who's that?'. Cut to the boys on their way to the outhouses, and Marcus voicing Leo's subjective thoughts by saying 'my sister is very beautiful'. Finally, a medium shot of Leo followed by a counter shot of Marian in close-up completes the exposition: Losey conceives his narrative strictly in accordance with the emotional logic of the themes, ensuring that every thematically important moment has its double articulation — a subjective vision (Leo's consciousness in action and evolution) confronting the objective existence of worlds outside this vision — mediated by the ordering intelligence of the camera, which never breaks the continuity of a universe at once visibly created, instantly present and reflected upon.

It would be superfluous to show how this principle throughout the film regulates the narrative rhythm, with its temps morts, its digressions, repetitions and final acceleration, and determines the montage (the way Losey suggests subjective time in the scene where Leo catches the ball, without having recourse to slow-motion is in itself worth a detailed study) — suffice it to say that it also allows him, in the most classical manner, to frame for instance a threshold, doors, gates, open fields or a straight country lane so as to chart minutely the stages in Leo's exploration of the moral and emotional terrain vague around him and within him. A haystack becomes the summit of exultation and the vantage point of boundless freedom, from which Leo-Mercury-Icarus lets himself fall in abandon, to be brought back to reality with the sharp pain of an injury that will leave his sensibility scarred for life; and the bark of an oak somewhere in the Norfolk countryside conveys the harsh truth of another tree of knowledge about a suffering and misery that nothing can mitigate. Perhaps it is this sense of the concrete, communicating in the very feel and texture of phenomena the universals of a cultural heritage and the recurrent crises of emotional life that gives Losey's film a place, paradoxically, not within the British cinema (where he is a toweringly isolated figure) but in the larger perspective of English literary and poetic tradition. And this is not only because the book from which the film is taken is something of a modern classic. Partly, Losey's own ethical outlook — which has always focussed (where his films did not describe desperate struggles for psychological, sexual and social supremacy over others, as in **Eve,** or **The Servant)** on the tragically wasteful effort of discovering one's moral identity and preserve one's self-respect at the price of emotional barrenness and self-denial — is a very 'British' one, and in the mainstream of English literature, especially amongst its foreigners (close to the ironic stoicism of Conrad, in fact).

More directly, however, the phenomenological realism that Losey has retained from his Hollywood background, which works by gesture and inflexion, and depends as much on the turn of a head as on the turn of a phrase, has been (in its literary equivalent) the customary domain of the English realist novel and the strength of English poetic diction since the Romantics. It is the particular achievement of what is generally meant by the Great Tradition, for it implies a certain belief in the stability as well as the transparency of modes and codes of behaviour, a belief in the existence of a social life — intact, functioning, normative and formative alike on a variety of distinct social levels, and thus presupposing a degree of national identity, a consensus of values and objectives, where discrepancies in behaviour and pretention, lapses of language and intonation could be interpreted as a reliable guide to an individual's background and mentality, and where the social and linguistic performance of a person was a conclusive index to his intentions. It meant that no inner life, no mental reality, existed which could not be made manifest through behavioural or linguistic mimesis.

The harsh truth of another tree of knowledge **(The Go-Between).**

These assumptions Losey acknowledges at the same time as he turns them inside out, by relativizing their historical and aesthetic validity. **The Go-Between,** above all, defines bourgeois social life as socializing ritual, and the country house with its pursuits of leisure as a field-exercise in upper-class ideology. The oblique angle under which the Maudsleys are viewed — oblique both because seen through Leo; the outsider, and because within the flow of ordinary life, the summer holiday clearly assumes the nature of an interlude — exposes how church-going, cricket, the village fête or even bathing are demonstrations of class-solidarity and lessons in class-consciousness. A trespasser, does one chase him off or put him at his ease? A school cap just isn't worn at a private match, a gentleman cricketer (which Ted is not) doesn't bat in such a way as to endanger the ladies, and it's slightly more in order to call someone Trimingham than Mr Trimingham if he is also a Viscount.

In all this Pinter is surely for something — a dramatist who in his own work has been undermining the positivist assumptions that ordinary language is the measure of all valid thought, and who has traced the rough edges of banal and every day conversation, pointing up the crack and gaps where it gives way to another reality altogether. Thus a Pinter line of dialogue is as maliciously trimmed with the grotesque fringes from the civilities of social discourse as a Losey track or pan may be subtly revelatory of fundamental contradiction in the smooth tissue of a visual surface. The projects on which they have collaborated, in addition, seem to reflect a major predilection — to create situations where a certain reality, however preposterous it may seem to an outside observer is nevertheless accepted by the protagonists at face value. As they are vainly struggling within their limited awareness to make sense of the only kind of life the know, that limited conception of reality is dialectically shown to have its own justification, if only in that it confers a certain remote rectitude and stature to those thus failing.

A particularly moving example of such irony is

the smoking room episode. Responding to Leo's baffled question about sexual fidelity, Trimingham bends forward with impeccable composure to pronounce the secret cross borne by the men of his class — that 'a lady is never at fault': both Leo and he have been betrayed by Marian, yet somehow each is only dimly aware of the pain inflicted upon the other. That Trimingham can bear his burden with equanimity obviously indicates a heroic dignity of sorts, but it also explains why Marian would feel the need to be unfaithful or reject him altogether. Sexuality is her only means of rebelling against a social order which in the realm of personal relationships at least, crucifies both men and women. In the same scene a remark falls about Ted having a woman up these parts. 'I know' says Leo, 'but she doesn't come on Sundays', thinking of Ted's char. The men show an indulgent, slightly pained smile. But the irony is of course that despite Leo being the victim of a semantic confusion which makes him look ridiculous and naive, he knows more about Ted's 'woman' than either Trimingham or Mr. Maudsley.

At times Pinter's dialogues seem merely to furnish with quaint phrases the different worlds created by Losey's mise-en-scene, like the period bric-a-brac that fills the rooms of the house. The public-school slang between the boys, the quips about ladies being gatered rather than seized, or Trimingham having been 'gored by the Boers' are arabesques decorating however a quite solid thematic architecture: the language of the Maudsleys gives a recognizable value to the things that surround them and which they dominate, yet it also protects them from life outside, and it ultimately hides them from each other. They assume it as a code — to define and defend themselves against every manner of intrusion. Thus, the different linguistic worlds are brought into sharp contrast by Losey not only to give expression to the poignant inadequacies of language in the effort towards emotional adulthood (Leo's difficulties when trying to grasp the reality behind the word 'spooning' and Ted's final 'mind you get it told right'), but to draw attention to the whole process of naming as a way of appropriating reality, with its inherent distortion of experience: Losey lets no false nostalgia subsist about Edwardian idylls, for Marian's closing words to Leo Colston about the affair having been a thing of beauty are unmasked by the film as the gross insensitivity of a person used to dispose over words and people alike. In Marian's world Colston is a man robbed of his own experience, because there seems no language in which he could affirm it. Almost always seen from behind glass and windows or enveloped in a rainy mist, he inhabits a subaquatic world of silence.

It is here that Losey undercuts most clearly the assumptions of L P Hartley's original: the character of Colston, all bitter-stoic resignation to an empty life and choking on his memories, belongs in his Wordsworthian preference for enjoying feelings through contemplation (or quietly suffering them) — as Adorno has said of an Aldous Huxley hero — 'to the sentiental standbys of the modern English novel'. In comparison with the book, Losey has not only reduced the presence of Colston, but changed his function, making him the furtive shadow looming ahead of, and so to speak, 'rising to meet' the actual Leo of thirteen 'at evening', rather than the reflecting and thereby dominating narrator. Instead the controlling function falls unambiguously to the camera, for by weaving the dualism of subjective and objective points of view into a cinematic unity where one perspective comments and interprets the other, and by showing that the worlds existing side by side are essentially closed, Losey achieves a perspective with a different depth, in a process of distanciation which allows him to reinterpret critically the moral position of his characters and his own aesthetic position as the director. Because the action is seen from Leo's point of view, the camera shares with Leo the stance of an outsider, — but on the far side of Leo's subjective involvement. The result is a complex aesthetic relativism, by which Losey is able to comment on the limits of his own mise-en-scene.

At first glance, the classical style that relies on 'pars pro toto' symbols and a metaphoric use of setting, landscape and incident is especially convincing where it is used to represent those aspects of bourgeois mentality that bear an affinity to such a style: the cult of objects, for example, treasured not for their aesthetic qualities or practical usès, but for their 'sentimental' value, is an act of symbolization in daily life which has its direct equivalent in the cinema when an object figuring in the action later reappears to take on a special meaning by virtue of its previous context. Leo's bathing suit, because of its association with Marian, or Ted's bloody handkerchief are such symbolic objects overcharged with emotional significance. Similiarly, the fact that the Maudsleys' style of life is an expression of breeding and 'nurture' transmitted and exercised through repetition in social and family life, seems to confirm a resolute anti-naturalism (in the sense that it does not tolerate the contingent, just as it frowns upon spontaneous manifestations of emotion), which on the level of style (and stylization) makes a tree not just a tree and rain more than a metereologocial phenomenon.

The analogies and parallelisms which can be drawn between the closed social situation which the film depicts and the equally 'closed' symbolic style where nothing is random, perhaps explain why there is a sense that something is hollow at the core of the film, or rather, that there is a very strong (and it seems to me intentional) feeling of absence created: we are aware of another reality, which if we knew it would restore our balance as spectators, but which Losey never shows and the Maudsleys as a matter of course would not and could not acknowledge as existing. And that reality is evidently Marian and Ted's affair seen 'from outside'. Only when Mrs Maudsley, still wearing her paper hat, seizes Leo by the sleeve and drags him out into the pouring rain to surprise the lovers in the act, does she break 'form', in the same sense as the film at the end breaks its form, and would have broken its form had it, say, shown Ted talking to his charwoman or had attempted to explain what the affair was 'really' like. And this is not only because in order to be consistent, Losey could in any case show no more than what Leo himself had witnessed, but because these things,

The Edwardian Summer coming to an end
(The Go-Between)

within the framework that the film sets itself, belong to a different (dis-)order of reality. That is also why Ted's suicide is a dramatic and metaphoric, rather than a psychological necessity, and why seeing Ted and Marian together in the hay-loft is precisely timed to produce a traumatic (but for the spectator also cathartic) climax. The sudden acceleration, with frayed tempers at the birthday party, the growing tension of Mrs Maudsley, the thunderstorm, the sense of an almost apocalyptic disaster, which fragments the narrative at the end into a series of explosive flashes, results from a perfect convergence of style and theme: the forces of sex explode the Maudsleys' world, while the direct representation of the sexual act makes the process of 'symbolization' redundant: repression of sexuality created the void in Colston's life, but its emergence in his childhood destroys the magic universe of innocent sublimation, which is indeed also universe of art. Knowledge, Losey seems to be saying — as in so many of his films — is always accompanied by loss and a diminution of creativity.

Looked at from its subjective point of reminiscence, **The Go-Between** is Leo's fiction, a 'fable of identity' between the intuition of what he might have been to himself and what he knows to be to others, which Losey shows in action, in contradiction and also in collusion with the wider circles of ideological fictions that hold social and personal life together in time. To the question of who Leo Colston finally is, the film gives a dialectical answer: identity is a constant effort against the forces of disintegration, but it is an ambiguous achievement, because of what it excludes, the rigour it imposes, the possibilities it has to negate, the potential it leaves unfulfilled. As an attitude to life it is the sign of a modern, emancipated and thoroughly scepical puritanism, pushed to the point where moral integrity and personal dignity cannot but appear as slightly absurd and indeed eccentric.

Losey's mastery of the fluid transitions between Leo's and the Maudsleys' points of view is thus made possible by the fact that both still belong essentially to the same world, and furthermore, both live on the assumption (which the film disproves) that they have control over their environment — Leo by his magic and the Maudsleys by their social status. The dialectic of subjective-objective vision operates between a voyeur whose desire it is to belong, be part of, and a world which either ignores him or merely lectures him on its own absolute standards — not between the rebel opposing his own vision of reality to the temptations of a form of life as beautiful and deadly as an atropa belladona growing in a decay which is almost wilderness again. Leo, outsider and a child, is in no position to develop his own form of revolt, and he, like the Maudleys, 'cannot bear much reality'.

If there is therefore good reason why the contingent has no room in Brandham Hall and ultimately none in the life of Leo Colston — what about Losey's mise-en-scene, can it do more than exorcise it with the magic of style, can it accommodate a non-symbolic image of the world and still communicate something? In **Figures in a Landscape,** that much underrated 'experimental' film, Losey tried to fuse, with an extraordinary audaciousness in the handling of the narrative continuity, the virtues of a 'closed' psychological situation (two men on the run and therefore dependent on each other) with a sense of indeterminacy (the sudden interruption of action in the ambush on the power station and the appearance of soldiers out of nowhere) designed to throw the situation open — but it makes the film extremely difficult to decipher. Certainly apart from **Figures,** Losey has shown a consistent preference for depicting closed social or psychological situations, and no doubt this is partly why a man with left-wing sympathies and intelligence is as an artist profoundly attached to the 'style', rituals and fictions of the British bourgeoisie, who from a certain level upward is still the most cohesive and 'insular' national bourgeoisie anywhere. Losey escapes from insularity — like all highly self-aware artists — by setting up the mirrors of reflection within his own work.

The strength of **The Go-Between** is therefore precisely that it is also a meditation about the freedom and restriction of a cinematic form, in the way its fictional procedure, its treatment of consciousness, time and reality constantly emphasizes the limits and restrictions of the world it depicts and affirms the existence of other worlds in marking the boundaries of this one. By thinking so clearly the limits of his own cinema, Losey has in a sense already transcended them, and after such a Kantian exercise, the cinema seems ready for its Hegel.

Thomas Elsaesser

Private Road

Private Road GB 1971 *Dir* Barney Platts-Mills *Sc* B P M *Pr* Andrew St John *Phot* Adam Barker-Mill *Mus* G Fenton M Feast D Dundas *Ed* Jonathan Gili *Cast* Susan Penhaligon (Ann Halpern) Bruce Robinson (Peter Morissey) Michael Feast (Stephen) George Fenton (Henry) *Prod* Maya Films (89 min)

There are sometimes after all opportunities that are almost not in accord with the general situation, opportunities in which by means of a word, a glance, a sign of trust, more can be achieved than by means of lifelong exhausting efforts. Indeed that is how it is. But, then again, of course, these opportunities are in accord with the general situation in so far as they are never made use of. But why then are they never made use of? I ask time and again. **Kafka** The Castle

Fortunately it is just not possible to write a review of **Private Road.** What follows is both less than that and more. For too many other things are involved. The posture of the reviewer rests on many doubtful assumptions: a determination to ignore or to dispose of as ancillary the privileged or disadvantaged position of the work in terms of the financial or artistic resources available for its realisation, to concentrate on the experience offered in all its immediacy, to sample it as merely one among many possible and potential experiences. It is to postulate the visibility of something whose existence is highly problematic: 'the British Cinema' and to render invisible the mechanisms and institutions that are involved in the sponsoring, financing, distributing — even criticising — of filmic merchandise. For British culture is a quite unique and extraordinary perpetual motion machine dedicated to the fostering, retraining and replacement of its traditional elites; it offers opportunities, encouragement and support to those who are already well established and reserves its highest honours and accolades for dedicated mediocrity, faithful careerism and unrelenting respectability. It would be singularly naive to assume that to write say, a favourable review of **Private Road,** could constitute a significant gesture in the direction of encouraging the art of the film, when that art is already so much encouraged. In speaking of **Private Road** it seems necessary to think of it in terms of the opportunity it presented. It is easy to oscillate between extremes: between being pathetically grateful that it is there at all and deploring it as a reckless waste of hard-to-get, expensive celluloid. How would you review a film if you could only have one?

Of course that is to put the matter rather too drastically. **Private Road** is only one way out of the British cinematic cul-de-sac. But how many other roads are there going to be? Who will build them and who will travel them? And who, practically, needs **Private Road** to the point of travelling to Notting Hill to see it? Actually, not many people. And the more seriously we take **Private Road** the more it becomes part of the problem, an obstacle in the way of a recognition of the gravity of the situation.

Private Road signifies little in either financial or artistic terms; it just happens to be conveniently there as documentary evidence that can be filed away for future reference in that rather empty dossier, hopefully entitled 'The British Cinema'. There has always been some sort of proof of the existence of a British cinema which is why one has never needed to exist. **Private Road** is a kind of celebration of its own impossibility — and for a cinema magazine that exists even when it has no right to exist it would seem only natural to hail a movie that is in the same position. Both in their own distinct and improbable way constitute part of the evidence for a British film culture which barely exists and which is virtually smothered to death by idleness, complacency, apathy. It is this situation that needs reviewing and not **Private Road.**

Who is responsible? Basically the distributors and the handful of people who monopolised such power, privilege and patronage as there was, who kept a tight grip over the directorial assignments, who, since they had no talent, never regarded it as sufficient qualification for entry. In the brief heyday of swinging British cinema it was easy to believe that Betty Box and Ralph Thomas were phantasms from a bad dream; but they were no less real than Bryan Forbes and Richard Attenborough. From an early date the British cinema formed a conception of its own destiny. In England we were to have neither an art cinema nor a genuinely popular cinema, a bodying forth of the clichéd and blinkered conception of the world of Britain's governing elites, a faithful reflection of their smugness and endemic philistinism. The vaunted realism it exhibited, its preoccupation with the nuances of class was quite simply propaganda; a pious hope that what already existed would, must go on existing. It was a didactic, patronising class that disdained both art and its audience, that displayed the same insensitivity of tone, the indifference to context, that maintained the same inflexible, imperturbable wavelength as a Gaumont British news, or a BBC announcer. It was not a matter of giving people what they wanted, let alone honesty or truth but of telling them what it would be advisable for them to hear. Thus the indoctrination, the propaganda, the shameless lying of World War II, was merely the finest hour of British elite culture, its most worthwhile opportunity to practice its métier; and the socially necessary myth of the War, set forth in Wyler's **Mrs Miniver,** of a laying aside of class differences in the face of a common enemy became the axiomatic assumption that 'class' should be deemed to have ceased to exist in theory, while continuing indispensibly in practise. The cinema was an agent of mystification and also of its own self-perpetuation. For the British cinema need never be anything other than what it already was. **Doctor in the House** and **The Angry Silence, Carry On Camping** and **Young Winston;** these are its alpha and omega, the whole gamut of British emotion from A to B. In Britain the notion that capitalism was entrepreneurial and risk-taking has never been taken very seriously; full acknowledgement has always been given to the virtues of the monopoly and the cartel, the inestimable benefit of having the market completely sewn up. The question of an alternative cinema has simply never reached the agenda.

Thus, the dilemma of **Private Road,** and of any any film which originates outside the central control apparatus is that it is subject to Catch 22: which is that it can only vindicate its own existence, only indicate the viability of an alternative cinema by reaching a large popular audience, though this opportunity is denied it by virtue of the fact that it is not part of the existing institutional set up. Platt-Mills' earlier film has not yet covered its costs and it seems unlikely that **Private Road** will fare any better. The interest of **Private Road** is that it tacitly acknowledges this superfluousness, this objective irrelevance and makes it into its subject.

Private Road broaches two main themes: the attempt of a writer to become 'successful', his relationship with a girl from a comfortably off, respectable, bourgeois background. It is therefore very much in the main tradition of the British cinema in recent years, where the hero, typically, sought acceptance and recognition from those socially superior to him, while at the same time reserving the right to reject and mock their values and pretentions. The difference is that Platts-Mills seems ultimately to recognise that neither of these themes is worth exploring, and the picture, in its vacillation between them, in the very detachment and neutrality with which they are treated, emerges as a parody of the whole genre, though this is not altogether its intention. It would have been easy for him to portray Peter Morrissey; the 'brilliant young writer' as an angry

IBM Firepower **(Private Road)**

rebel, railing against an uncomprehending literary establishment which will not publish his novels. Of course it is a mistake to describe him as brilliant when we can have no evidence for it — a writer should always be 'a writer' and nothing more — and his earnings from 'Women's Own' are absurd, but Platts-Mills does at least see that his writer is essentially a conformist and that his attempts to earn money from the power of his pen are only different in degree from his work in advertising and not, as it might appear, fundamentally opposed. It is simply that there is a use for commercials plugging a pudding for dogs but not for 'old-fashioned' novels. Publishing, like the British cinema, can use what it can make use of; it specialises in presenting a melange of commercial, fashionable and covertly ideolgical prejudices as aesthetically grounded value judgements. Anything which has not been specifically designed to intersect in this particular conjuncture, like Morrissey's novel, like Platts-Mills' film; anything that is gratuitous, that was written or made because somebody wanted to, necessarily falls short of what is demanded because it does not actively work to propagate existing illusions. It is strangely limp. Its work rate is low. Up to a point, of course this serves as a positive recommendation. ('It is a relief, of course, to get away from generation-gap posturing . . . to a film which suggests that its characters would like to be left alone to work things out, and to stare when they want to at the river', 'Sight and Sound').

But **Private Road**'s very lack of conviction, its presentation of 'making it' as merely one pit-fall laden option, cannot but be slightly subversive.

Peter's friend Stephen, who has dropped out and who works for British Railways simply to get money, clearly leads a less compromised existence. We recognise that the problems which Peter creates for himself are largely the result of his own confused motivations. He is already part of straight society because its imperatives always figure prominently in his mind. Peter is a cipher and the justification of the final scene of the film, whimsical as it is, is that it effectively deflates his pretensions. Peter is put in a situation where he has to help Stephen steal an electric typewriter from an office. Stephen steals it for him: as an emblem of his commitment to writing, which he has given up while in the advertising agency. Yet as a symbol the expensive typewriter quite transcends its ostensible function: what it conveys is the genuineness of Stephen's feeling for Peter, but the actual absurdity of the ambitions it is designed to implement. Stephen's gesture we feel is more significant than any novel which the typewriter could be used on. Again, our inability to relate the technological firepower of the IBM golfball to the actual process of composition suggests the absurdity of the object itself, the distortion of values and priorities which it represents. The ending validates itself because it does not provide a magical solution but serves as a comment, casting retrospective doubt on everything that has gone before. Stephen has actually understood Peter very well: writing a novel equals an electric typewriter. All the intimations of the picture collapse into this simple recognition.

On the whole the picture exemplifies very well the characteristic strength and weaknesses of the British cinema. On the one hand there is the eye for detail, the attempt to get specifics right, the loving care with which nuances of speech, dress and behaviour are rendered; on the other the strange inability to get any kind of subject into focus, to make the central characters into meaningful centres of attention, to convey a sense of verisimilitude that is anything more than skin deep. And in Platts-Mills, too, there is the tendency to let an audience take away from the picture whatever it wants to, which is a serious fault. In this respect there are a number of parallels with a director like John Schlesinger. Schlesinger has a good eye for backgrounds and for surface appearances. One of the few merits of **Midnight Cowboy** was its readiness to put on film parts of the USA that are seldom shown. On the other hand Schlesinger never honestly confronts the facts of a class society and its values: his treatment invariably glamourises what it ostensibly deplores. The romantic phoniness of the British cinema, of which Schlesiger is representative, was never fully recognised because of its earnest air of social realism and its decor of factory chimneys. British cinema in the sixties could always have its cake and eat it: gesticulate in horror at the rat race and gloat over its rewards, yet affectionately celebrate the tranquil idylls from it when the hero was 'truly happy'. The American cinema has always been more honest in its preoccupation with the mystique of success and was therefore also capable of honestly repudiating it, in a movie like **Mister Cory.** Yet it is possibly surprising to see how little contemporary relevance the British genre of rat-race vs idyll actually had, how few changes in British society were actually reflected there. The fact is that at that time, marginal figures like the working class hero, the social climber and misfit were alreay an irrelevance, part of the mythology, because the really significant feature was the emergence or growth of self-conscious social **groups,** whether mods or rockers or art students or graduates or whatever, and who consequently were not poised in tragic isolation between one class and another. Yet the trials and tribulations of these marginal individuals served as the strongest possible argument for maintaining the status quo.

What emerges from this, is that it is precisely the surface 'realism' of the British cinema, its preoccupation with behaviour, with the signals that differentiate one class or sub-class from another that enables it to get away with absurdly unrealistic subjects and to present them in a way that is totally bereft of a critical perspective. By appearing to tackle the isue of class head on, by making it into their obsessive subject, the British film makers endowed it with an eternal, unalterable facticity before which the spectator would bow his head in mute acknowledgement that that indeed was how life was. If the post-war British cinema overtly preached the gospel of the unity of all classes, and looked to the day when capital and labour would lie down together in harmony **(The Man in the White Suit** etc), it at least recognised that genuine conflicts of interest were involved and betrayed its ideological character by its uncertainty of tone. The cinema of the sixties, by contrast, replaced the working class with a working class hero, who wanted only to be successful, to have a good time or both. Yet even these restricted horizons were touched with a Promethean tinge — to ask for so much, these 'daring' movies seemed to say, was to defy the Gods and fly in the face of nature. The hero became a pathetic figure, whose dreams and ideals were so at odds with reality that they could only find fulfillment in fantasy — this, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, was the theme of pictures like **Morgan, Charlie Bubbles** and the Kiplingesque **If . . .** But the 'solution' was no more absurd than the problem.

Thus the merit of **Private Road** is that it trivialises everything which the cinema of the sixties sought to magnify. The exhaustion of old themes may yet signal the entry of new themes, given only the existence of opportunities which are not in accordance with the general situation and directors who are capable of making use of them. The alternative cinema is now on the agenda.

David Morse

Leo the Last

Leo the Last GB 1969 *Dir* John Boorman *Sc* JB and Bill Stair *Phot* Peter Suschitzky *Ed* Tom Priestley *Mus* Fred Myrow *Cast* Marcello Mastroianni (Leo) Billie Whitelaw (Margaret) Calvin Lockhart (Roscoe) Glenna Forster-Jones (Salambo) Vladek Sheybal (Laszlo) *Prod* Chartoff/Winkler for United Artists (105 min)

Boorman's cinematic apprenticeship was one of impeccable respectability: like the currently fashionable Ken Russell and John Schlesinger, he worked for some years in television, directing documentaries that were remarkable for their apprehension of the power of social mechanisms to pervert people's intuitive responses to phenomena. This articulation of the discrepancy between what people say, feel, and what they actually do, is the theme that recurs in modified form in **Leo the Last,** though it is only one aspect of a complex film: unlike that of others, Boorman's talent is not one that has atrophied in the transition from television to feature films.

His first feature, **Catch Us If You Can** (1965), handles unpromising material (of the Dave Clark Five) with some skill, moulding a lively narrative around the theme of the struggle of the individual against conformist collectivising influences (the 'establishment' in the guise of an advertising agency. His next two films were made in the States and gained critical recognition: **Point Blank** (1967) displayed a vitality and acutance that suggested a major talent in the making: its control of the tensions of the gangster organization (this film's social mechanism against which the individual (Lee Marvin) wages his futile struggle), its reduction of dialogue to a minimum in order to emphasize the significance of visual phenomena, its manipulation of colour, all contribute to the coherence of the parable, so that the image of the gangster environment quickly gains credibility as a microcosm of America.

Boorman's next film, **Hell in the Pacific** (1968), has not been seen in this country in the form Boorman intended, as the producers substituted a different ending to the one Boorman shot. Despite this, the film was again well received, and put Boorman in the position of being able to make his next film, **Leo the Last,** without interference of any sort from producers. **Hell in the Pacific** explores the nature of the forces that prevent the two protagonists (Toshiro Mifune and Lee Marvin) from establishing a lasting relationship: it is their (anti-) social conditioning (Britain and Japan are at war) that is the prime obstacle to any mutual trust. The setting of the film is an island: once again we note Boorman's deliberate limiting of his field of view, by which he facilitates (1) that he has close control over aspects of environmental detail, (2) that his psychological exploration is unimpaired by extraneous matter, (3) that the film can work on the level of a parable, the metaphorical basis of the island as microcosm to the real world's macrocosm being clear. Precisely the same process is at the heart of **Leo the Last** (1969), in which the entire action takes place within the confines of one dingy London street which was painted black, as part of the successful endeavour to endow the film's visual texture with a quality concomitant to one of its central thematic statements:

'Racialism is perhaps where it begins, but the reason the whole picture . . . will be in blacks, whites and greys is that I want to establish visually as well as thematically the farcical aspect of any sort of 'color' problem.'[1]

The fundamental plot is disarmingly simple: Leo, a foreign prince, returns to his paternal home to convalence. The house is at the end of a cul-de-sac, and is surrounded on both sides by tenement buildings inhabited by poor coloured workers. By watching events in the street from his room, Leo gradually acquires a close emotional bond with the oppressed, and gets himself a saviour-complex; upon discovering that he is the landlord of the whole street, Leo decides to liberate his tenants from such bondage, and finally the mansion is blown up by the collective efforts of the street's community. In outline like this, all seems simple enough: what transforms the script into a remarkable achievement is the subtly complex interweaving of several layers of significance, of themes, and of styles. Stylistically the film moves easily between realism (the opening of Leo's wedding rehearsal) and fantasy (its end); this oscillation is acceptable in terms of the film's unity because we are consistently aware that what we witness on the screen is a filtered reality: this filtering operates on two levels. Firstly the narrative is told from Leo's point of view, and Leo's status in this closed environment is

barely one of normalcy, in so far as he is in the throngs of rejecting his aristocratic life-style: this is graphically illustrated by the hyperbolic, gluttonous party-scenes in the mansion, which are presented directly through Leo's eyes. He can no longer respond to the egocentric hedonism of these absurd, macabre, fascist dilettantes. The problem is the acquisition of an alternative milieu for Leo in which to function. For at the outset, just as Leo is severed from his background by his moral/intuitive attitudes, so he is separated from the community of the street by a class barrier. Leo's isolation is manifested visually in two distinct ways, the first of which we have already noted in Boorman's treatment of the 'high-society' episodes: expressionist hyperbole. The second is inherent in the way in which we observe the poorer inhabitants of the street: through Leo's telescope (it is the perfect instance of camera as voyeur) which naturally minimises any physical proximity to the events observed. This mood is set from the opening frames, in which we witness Leo's arrival in the street; we watch through the windscreen of the car; it is raining and the images are indistinct and distorted; there is an insulating slice of glass between Leo and the rest of the world right from this point. Even when in the street, Leo remains insulated from the pulse of life, either through his incapacity to act (as when the old man falls in the street), or through the intervention, again, of glass: when he observes the chaotic episode of the pigeon let loose in the grocery store, his face is pressed to the window, peering eagerly through the grime. In **Point Blank,** Boorman used a chaos of 'Resnais-like fast cuts' in order to isolate Lee Marvin from all purely social explanation, background, context: Leo's deracination is established more delicately and integrally, for the technique outlined above validates its extreme both on the level of the evolution of the plot (it couldn't happen without the telescope), and on the metaphorical plane. For the significance of visual phenomena is emphasised by the number of silent events we observe through the telescope and windows. Our sensitivity to what we **see** is called upon through the film, and Boorman's use of colour, and, more importantly, recurrent motifs enhance the richness of the visual texture.

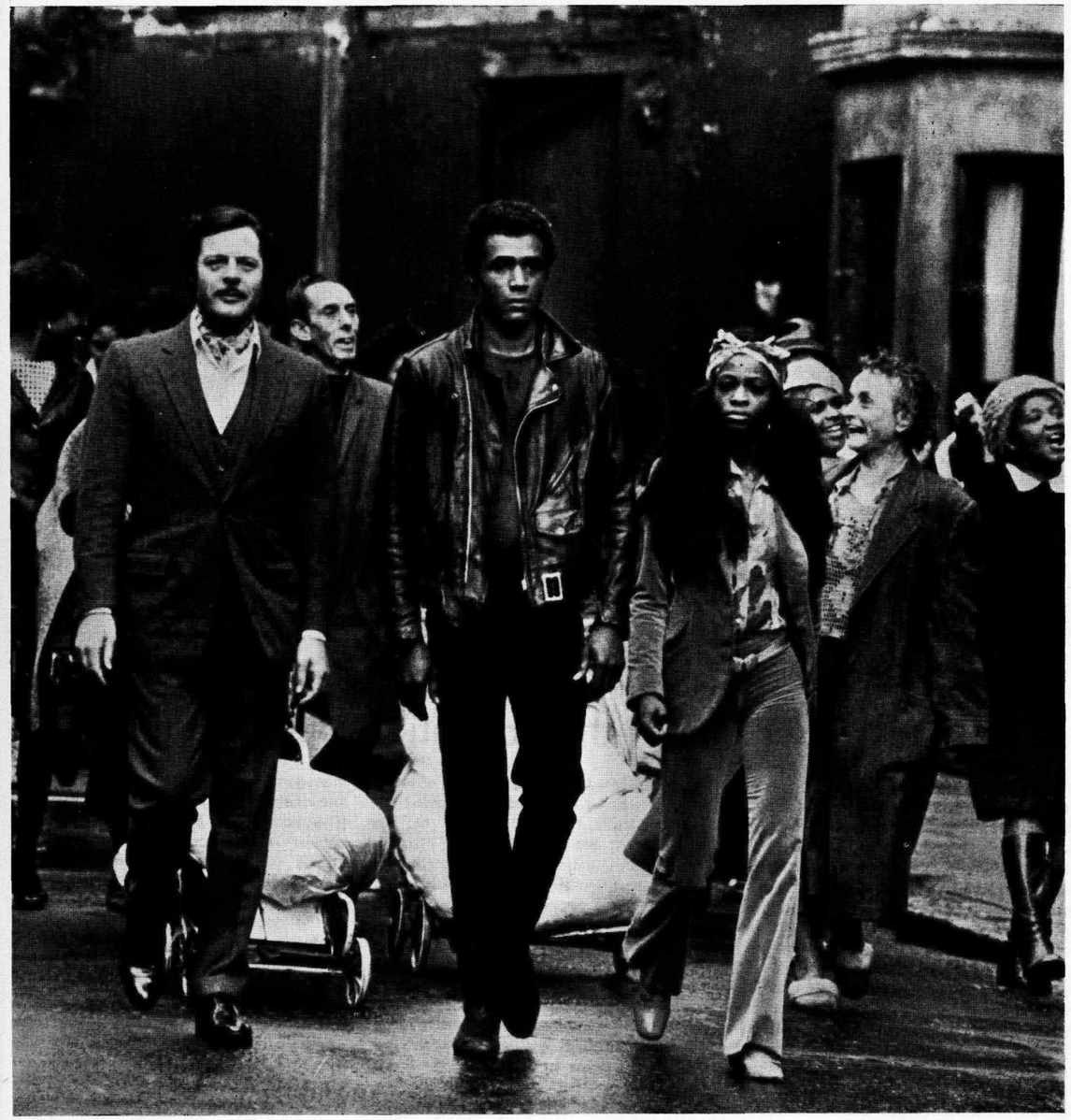
Just as the idea of a 'filtered reality' is established from the opening shots, so are two important motifs introduced: birds and water. The water on the windscreen bears an aura of gloom: (it is hardly the regenerative water of Fellini), and the image recurs in the ludicrous swimming-pool sequence (the seething mass of flaccid flesh deludes itself into feeling 'liberated', while Leo feels only wet and lavatorial); its final appearance heralds the demise of the pimps, in their dousing in the squalor of the laundry. Nevertheless the use of water serves more as a textural constant than a thematic base, unlike the symbol of the bird. Leo is an ornitologist, and there are references to birds sanctuaries in the first minutes of the film. It is because he is watching pigeons through his telescope that he first becomes aware of the curious happenings in the flats opposite, and the bird image takes on an elaborate metaphorical existence: where Leo is content to watch the birds from a distance, the young negro, Roscoe, actually **uses** the pigeon for his own ends. Birds, we have been reminded, often live in a sanctuary, just as the bourgeoisie/aristocrats inhabit a sanctuary of privilege; Roscoe's capture and utilisation of the pigeon represents in one sense an attack on privilege, while in another sense Roscoe takes on (at least for Leo), the attributes of a bird, both literally ('the bird has flown' says someone of Roscoe when the police are in pursuit), and by metaphorical extension (Roscoe usurps the place of the birds in Leo's mind, or, alternatively, metaphorically 'captures' Leo).

Michel Ciment has pinpointed the essential qualities of birds: 'L'oiseau, c'est le mouvement ailé, l'abandon de l'enveloppe charnelle, la rupture avec la matière, l'envie de quitter la terre décevante et sordide. Mais aussi . . . , l'oiseau presque tout sphérique est certainement le sommet, sublime et divin, de concentration vivant. On ne peut voir, ni imaginer même un plus haut degré d'unité. Excès de concentration qui fait la grande force personelle de l'oiseau, mais qui implique son extrême individualité, son isolement, sa faiblesse sociale.' L'oiseau est pour Leo à la fois ce qu'il voudrait être et ce qu'il est.'[2]

Leo is a bird that has been immobilised and isolated by the banal mediocrity of the surface of life: he eventually feels the potential beauty of the world, but a process of re-education must take place before he can find it. Thus Roscoe appears to Leo as both hero and teacher, and he is the catalyst that enables Leo to make the all-important flight from social isolation to communal integration. Yet to what extent 'integration' is achieved Boorman leaves in some doubt: the ending of the film has an ambiguity that cannot be offset by the apparent optimism of the last lines of dialogue: 'Well, you didn't change the world. — No, but we changed our street.'

If the film actually ended on this note, all might be well. However, Leo is still very much alone at the end, as the camera lingers on him gazing silently into the ruins and laughter echoes around the rumble of Leo's ancestral mansion. It is worth recalling the original ending of **Hell in the Pacific** (which still remains in the French prints of the film), in which the two protagonists separate, realising that their private alliance cannot surmount the barriers between them. Much of **Leo the Last** is concerned with Leo's breaking down of barriers — but barriers need not be broken from both sides: to what extent is Leo (the saviour) accepted by the populace? The question remains open but in the feather-weight allegiances of the women in the laundry and the street, which bounce easily from Leo to Jasper to Laszlo to Leo, there is little ground for the optimism of Michel Ciment who sees the end as a vindication of revolutionary politics in the hands of the masses:[3] Boorman's view is too cynical to accommodate only easy faith in the integrity of the people.

But then, in view of the stylistic complexity of the film, with its frequent oscillations from realism to symbolism, from satire to lyricism, it is unlikely that we will find a simple unambiguous 'statement' at the close. Since the only consistent 'camera-view' we get is one reflected through Leo's troubled mind, it follows that the film is not so much social commentary, as it is a psychological study. Certainly



Reeducation of the Borgeoisie **(Leo the Last)**

social concerns are important, but specifically only for the development of the narrative: the initial rich/poor, white/black dichototomies are revealed as simplicistic, and Leo's paternalistic mini-revolution has its basis in an oppressed/oppressor oppsition, which allows for the revelation that just as some white men are 'Beneficient', some black men are 'Exploiters'. Such a statement is barely sufficient to carry the weight of as fine a film as **Leo the Last,** though it is of sufficient strength to give the film its structural solidity. It is the continuance of the social thematic (in terms of the evolving sets of dialectical oppositions outlined above), that permits the central exploration of Leo's mental state to be broken into two sections: his phases of passive inaction ('I love the people in it (the world), but only at long range'), and his subsequent action.

Boorman's vision in **Leo's the Last** is one of profound maturity; denying the veracity of a straightforward 'realist' approach, with its attendant philosophical simplifications, he manages to articulate some of the psychic barriers that have to be broken before the 're-education' of the bourgeoisie can be accomplished: this articulation takes the form of a melange of styles: the soundtrack's excursions into burbling incensequentiality, with its neo-Prufrockian tone of despair, resignation, and confusion ('Trying to connect you . . .'), just as much as the cheerful surreality of many sequences (the grotesque buffet dinner and its subsequent leery seductions), or the overlay of songs on mute visuals: all blend into a coherent, if complext, unity, a unity that is at once dramatic conflict and acute psychological probing.

Martin Walsh

1 Boorman in an interview in *Sight and Sound,* summer 1969, p 121
2 Michel Ciment, quoting Michelet, in *Positif* no 118, p 35
3 *Ibid*

Cinema and Education

The British Film Institute

The case for the Education Department

The role of the BFI is set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association which stipulate that the Institute is to act as an agency for film users. Public sector involvement with the British Film Industry is in any case small and the BFI has no stake in production or the industry, its governors are to be appointed 'with due regard to the importance of associating the Instiute with the users of films'. And And the report of the Committee of Enquiry into the future of the BFI defines for the Institute an active policy of promotion of the use of film, its study and appreciation: 'The Institute's objects are to encourage the use and development of the cinematograph as a means of entertainment and instruction' and '... promote appreciation of film as a form of art and the specialised uses of film — largely in the field of education'.

Clearly there are inherent contradictions in the Institute; its practire of engagement in production, distribution and exhibition of films, its assumption of an entrepreneurial role, sits uneasily with its defined role, a role that enjoins it 'neither (to) seek to control nor attempt to interfere with purely trade matters in the film industry. The discrepancy between the role of the BFI, whose work goes to define the nature of the relationship between the cinema and society its activity as an agency in British film culture designed to promote and develop that culture, and its practice — has been manifest for years. The crises brought about by its internal contradictions have led to the resignation of two governors of the Institute (Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson), a written manifesto of complaint by senior staff of the BFI describing the 'demoralisation and frustration' of the staff, the replacement of the chairman of the governors, the resignation of the majority of the Institute's Education department, its education officer, and a general dissipation of the energy and resources of the Institute.

The most serious of these events is that involving the Institute's staff and the relegation to limbo of the Education department. For of the Institute's work it was that of the Education department which conformed most closely to the defined purposes of the Institute. There have been no public statements by the establishment of the Institute about the nature of the conflict with the Education department and the chairman of the governors has declined to discuss or expound the prevailing ethos of the BFI — on the grounds that a policy statement is to be made public in the near future; one may hope that it will define the policy of the Institute more precisely that were the objections to the practice of the Education department (it was categorised as 'too dogmatic' and 'unrealistic and rarified').

Until the BFI's statement is issued the nature of the management's quarrel with the Education department can only be a matter for speculation[1]; for the past and current policy and activities of the department have been fully expounded in the official annual publications of the Institute.

The general attitude of the Education department and its specific manifestations (the programme of publications, seminars, lectures — all criticised by management) have been explicitly acknowledge and practiced in the past. The policy has been, and properly so, activist — in accord both with the demands of the state of film study and education and with the BFI's Memorandum of Association. The self-definition of the department in its annual reports conforms well with the role of an agency, of promotion and development, put forward in the Committee of Enquiry's report: 'It is becoming increasingly obvious that the growth of the movement as a whole is dependent on making headway with defining more accurately the content and aims of film study' and adding: 'The idea of an agency is more dynamic than a concept like museum. The idea of film culture, is to imply an alliance of artist, critic and teacher in an activist programme'.

The Education department has been concerned with fostering a debate about the nature of film study and education, defining a programme of action for its practice, perhaps open to question in some of its tactics, but nonetheless formulated openly in conjunction with practicing film teachers and existing user organisations; notably the *Society for Education in Film and Television* and with the aim of supporting and consolidating existing activities. Its work has ranged from the Schools Council Humanities Curriculum project to encouraging the study of fundamental problems of cinematic signification — surely not inappropriate in an institution that should be, *pace* the report of the Committee of Enquiry: 'ensuring [and] publishing autoritative work of academic standard'? A discrepancy between the admirable programme of the Education department; the establishment of a regular Summer School, support for new film magazines not as has been suggested on a sectarian basis — *Cinema, Afterimage* and *Monogram* have been helped — and most importantly the provision of advice and information for film teachers both practicing and aspiring: the regular and explicit enunciation of these policies in annual reports and the remit of the Institute is hard to detect. Still harder is it to construct a rationale for the destruction of the Education department by its parent body.

And if the Education department is 'unrealistic and rarified' then the status of the NFT, describing itself in the BFI annual report as a 'museum and university of the cinema' defies the imagination. A National Film Theatre that can limit its *archive screenings to 6 in a session* and regard itself as a museum, and offer a meditation on fantasy in these terms:

'This fantasy element is not always stressed and has sometimes masked itself for reasons of some interest as another kind of cinema. 'Triumph of the Will' for example was intended deceptively to look like a realistic if emotional documentary actually it is an unreality masking a deep and disturbing fantasy view of the world', as appropriate to a University can only be described as 'unreality masking a deep and disturbing fantasy view of the world'.

The anomalies, inconsistencies and contradictions of the BFI might offer a little grotesque Ealing fun did they not jeopardise the livelihood and prejudice the work of the staff: it is admittedly inconvenient to go to Brussels or Paris for an archive cinema but it can be done, one can always read *Positif* instead of *Sight and Sound,* or enjoy the never never land of the annual balance sheet; its mysterious subventions to offset the losses sustained in a centralised Regional Film Theatre programme, and the magic accounting that can swell the cost of film extracts by a factor of ten. But people's work is at stake, the status of film studies in Britain is at risk and members of the Institute — whilst having no control over the policy or administration of the BFI — are still theoretically liable to defray financial losses proceeding from its activities. Article 8 of the Articles of Association states inter alia:

'Every member of the Institute undertakes to contribute to the assets of the Institute in the event of its being wound up while he is a member, or within one year after he ceases to be a member for payment of the debts and liabilities of the Institute.'

But the intentions of the new chairman have not yet been made explicit: so we may hope that the forthcoming policy statement will include:

(i) A statement of future policy, clearly defined in accordance with the Articles the Report of the Committee of Enquiry, of Association, the recommendations of and meeting the needs and situation of British film culture,

(ii) A reconciliation of the present practice of the NFT and publications departments with their roles as defined in the annual reports of the Institute and the Recommendations of the Committee of Enquiry.

(iii) A commitment to a more fully detailed annual financial report. At present members' financial commitments are greater than are those of shareholders in limited liability companies, and they receive less information and are able to exert less control than can shareholders.

If the tub shortly to be thrown out by the chairman of the BFI governors is unable to sustain any hopes for the future of the Institute, for an end to its tradition of authoritarianism, secrecy and dissipation of purpose, of human and material resources, then the activities of the Members Action Committee[2] offers the only possibility of advance out of this politics of rotten boroughs and administration by cabal, a condition in which the only satisfied members of the BFI can be those who enjoy: 'The sublime peaceful state of being well deceived, of being a fool among knaves'.

R E Collins

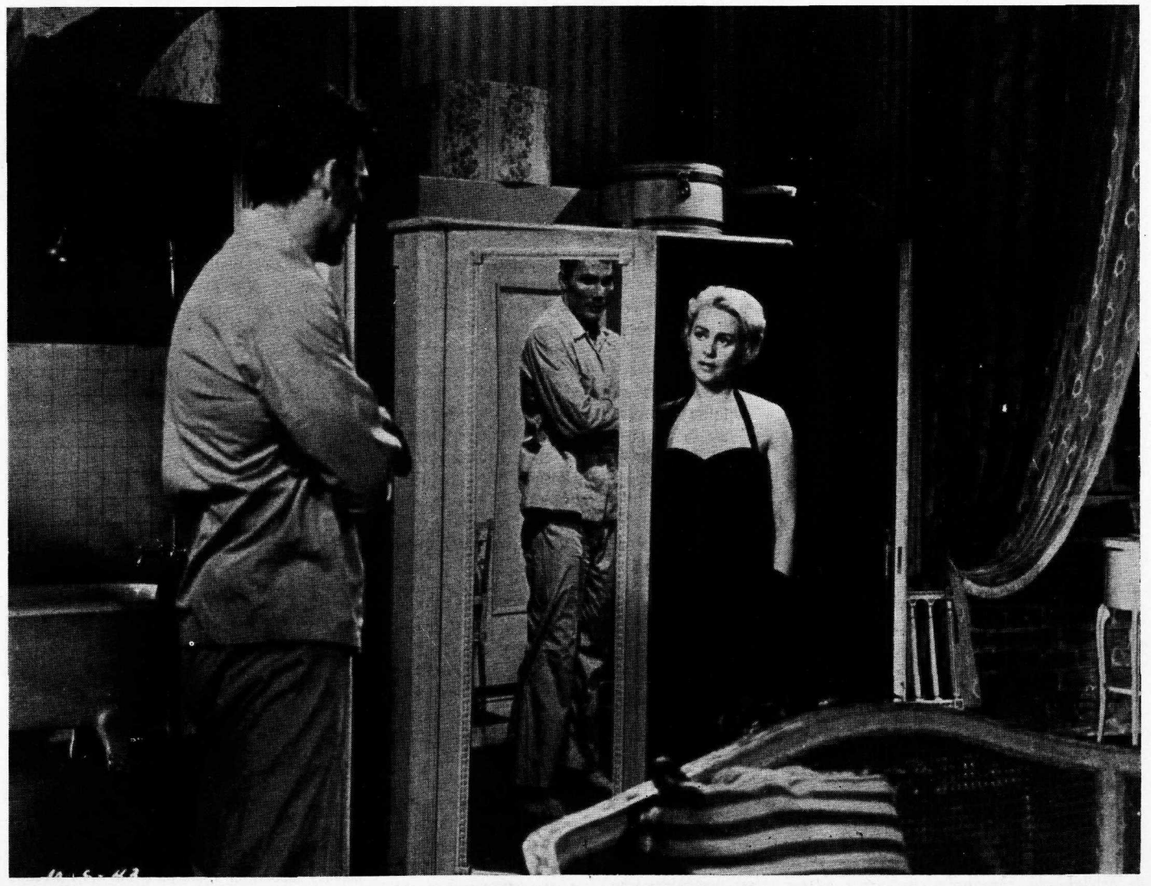
1 This article was written before the BFI Annual Meeting on Dec. 14th 1971. See Screen, *Autumn 1971 for detailed articles on the current crisis in British film education.*

2 The Members Action Committee was formed in 1970 by a group of BFI members to make the BFI accountable to its members. The committee is made up of film makers, critics, lecturers and other users of the Institute and exists to publicise a critique of the policy of the Institute and to mobilise support for a change in the BFI's practice and control and organization.

Blowing up the British Cinema

The ability to express metaphysical undertones in human behaviour in images on the screen, subtly, but decisively, differentiates the creative level of the American cinema from the British. The latter is in general dominated by the outward and visible life, and the images on the screen have no other meaning than on a purely literal level. This lack of substance inside the narrative is a central factor of the impoverishment and mediocrity of the British cinema. The widespread aesthetic and social assumptions of its directors are depressing and disheartening when compared with the allegorical and methaphysical interpretation of the Hollywood directors who communicate through visual symbols and metaphors.

In the British cinema the work of American directors (omitting the large number devoid of talent) falls into one main group; Leo McCarey **(The Devil Never Sleeps)**, Otto Preminger **(Bunny Lake Is Missing)**, Jacques Tourneur **(Night of the Demon)**, Hugo Fregonese **(Harry Black)**, Robert Parrish **(The Purple Plain)**, Tay Garnett **(A Terrible Beauty)**, Robert Aldrich **(The Angry Hills)**, Andre De Toth **(Play Dirty)**, possess both exceedingly varied degrees of talent and utterly different sensibilities, but in all these films their preoccupations are universalized rather related to any special characteristics of British culture; their approach embodies a full consciousness of the work they have already done in the United States, conferring upon their British films moral, psychological, emotional and physical dimensions and an integral style which were the distinctive properties of the American cinema. Joseph Losey's position is quite different, carrying an essentially English social and cultural mission, which, added to the strength and delicacy of his sensibility, has established him as the only major artist of the British cinema.



The work of these American directors puts the inadequacies of our own countrymen into perspective; an insufficiency caused by lack of talent as much as an imperviousness to the principles and methods which are incorporated into so many personal and individual Hollywood films. The resulting lack of an affirmative viewpoint and of a strongly sensed personal commitment is perhaps the key to the general absence of a rigorous and unified narrative style. **Ten Seconds to Hell** (1958), a Hammer thriller directed by Robert Aldrich, provides concrete evidence of the conflict between the values of Hammer and the British cinema generally, and the artistic intentions of a talented American director (it was cut down from 113 to 89 minutes); it also reveals not only a great deal about Aldrich's sensibility, but more significantly the unfulfilled potential of the fictional cinema in Britain.

Ten Seconds to Hell is ostensibly a thriller about a bomb disposal squad in post-war Berlin, but Aldrich's real concern is the need to confront fascism. Apart from their physical power, two members of the squad stand out from the rest. Eric Koertner (Jack Palance) by virtue of his moral decency and sensitivity, and Karl Wirtz (Jeff Chandler) by virtue of his nihilism and smugness. Wirtz, viciously determined to exploit the weaker members of the group and capitalize on the suicidal nature of their work, proposes a death pact in which each of the six men pools half his pay for three months, after which any survivors claim all. The rest subscribe to the pact without much consciousness, but for Eric Koertner it involves the crucial responsibility of opposing a fascist morality.

The characterization of the two men ensures that they are in no way invalidated as individuals because they have a democratic and fascist significance imposed upon them; the moral and political content thus reinforce the narrative built on violence and suspense. The director's positive attitude towards each character is one of the strengths of Hollywood, but encountered in a British film it calls attention to the neutrality and impartiality of the British cinema (one of the fundamental weaknesses and shortcomings of its directors).

In **Ten Seconds to Hell** the dark labyrinthine imagery is not in the least arbitrary or flashy and clearly springs from a foreign conception and experience, the compositional pattern having been carefully applied to give a clear insight into Eric Koertner's tormented dementia, his masochistic self-torture caused by his struggle with Karl Wirtz as one by one each member of the group is blown up. Aldrich confronts his characters in big close-ups with a definite purpose. Pushing his protagonists into the same shot with Jack Palance tremblingly profiled in the extreme foreground he brings into relationship Eric Koertner's moral consciousness and emotional turmoil with Karl Wirtz's jealousy of his high ideals and intense hostility against him. The point of the foreboding symbols and claustrophobic visual organization throughout is strengthened in the final very long shots taken from a high angle of Koertner leaving Wirtz to the impossible task of defusing the bomb alone; the spatial organization suggests the wider meaning of psychological as well as physical exorcism. By the extraordinary intensity of his unyielding close-ups, Aldrich assaults the sensibility of the spectator, causing a physical and emotional involvement in the conflicts and relationships. In a shot of Koertner engulfed in the hoops of an iron railing he gets right under the surface of his hero, a motif that suggests the pressure of unconscious forces on Koertner's mind and the terror that hangs over him.

It is precisely this use of metaphor, and passionate involvement conveyed by the power of the director's imagery, and good acting, which is typically American and quite absent in the work of our directors. The close-up shots of Koertner and Wirtz, a thousand pound unexploded bomb between them, seen together within the frame as they endeavour to defuse it, bring to light the kinship between the two men, their intensely shared emotions and experiences. The director has the aesthetic capacity to broaden the scope and intensity of the relationships beyond the limits of the scenario. The development of emotional and moral conflicts by the notion of combining the protagonists in an involuntary alliance is a popular practice in the American cinema, and a potent one in **Ten Seconds to Hell,** giving the relationship between the two main characters an undertone of feeling of empathy that very few British directors would have the aesthetic means to expres clearly. The concept of a bomb as the symbol of the malignant evil embodied in Karl Wirtz's doctrine of self-reliance must go unchallenged as the most remarkable metaphor in the British cinema.

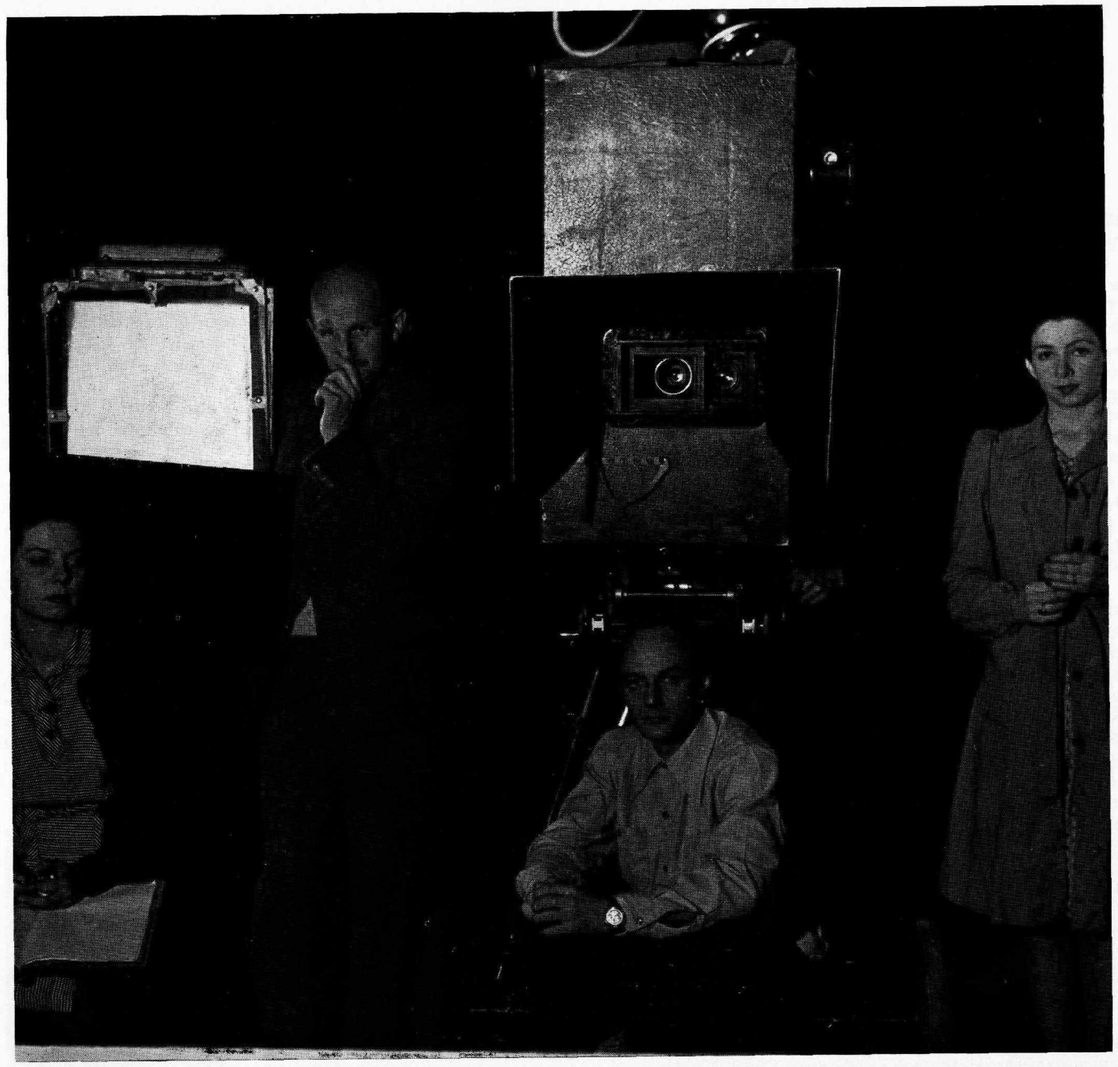
The contradictory temperaments of the two main characters in **Ten Seconds to Hell** has a familiar pattern in Aldrich's work; Jack Palance and Jeff Chandler are both victims, fated to suffer until they resolve their abiding obsessions to destroy one another and the morality they uphold. Death is a driving force inside both men, and Aldrich clearly delineates two opposing impulses in Koertners' mind: readiness to die in his fanatical determination to bear the burden of confronting Wirtz's ideals, and the instinct for self-preservation, the wish to survive the barbarous and degrading world he has endured for so long. Aldrich also presents Karl Wirtz as a fully rounded character. As well as his murderous egoism, he carries with him an acute melancholia, loneliness and self-pity. The struggle between the two men reaches its climax as Wirtz is faced with a type of British bomb that cannot posibly be defused by one man working on his own. When Koertner comes to his rescue, the vehement jealousy of his idealism and intolerable feeling of inadequacy drives Wirtz to a treacherous and abortive attempt to kill him. The close-up of Jack Palance, helplessly paralysed, with one finger supporting the firing pin, and his free hand struggling with the cable Wirtz is using as the murder weapon, is a brilliant climax of symbolic action, but archetypal of the American cinema generally. Aldrich doesn't add any condemnation of Wirtz other than the formidable one implicit in his act of moral degeneracy, which is shown as a consequence and symbol of his ideology.

Finally, defeated and left alone in a suburban setting wasted by war, which universalizes and epitomizes his view of life (demonstrating the instinctive gift of American directors to reveal and enlarge their characters by giving them a symbolic context of this sort), Karl Wirtz turns his destructive impulses upon himself.

The bomb explodes, and as Jack Palance's compassionate face emerges out of the abyss, the images testify that Robert Aldrich, like Josephy Losey **(The Damned)**, is more than able to hold his own against the mutilating efforts of the British film industry to pervert and interfere in individual artistic creativity.

Andrew Milne

Ten Seconds to Hell GB 1958 *Dir* Robert Aldrich *Sc* R A and Teddi Sherman, from the novel *The Phoenix* by Lawrence P Bachmann *Pr* Michael Carreras *Cast* Jeff Chandler (Wirtz) Jack Palance (Koertner) Martine Carol (Margot) Virginia Baker (Frau Bauer) Wes Addy (Sulke) Robert Cornthwaite (Loeffler) *Prod* Hammer (94 min)



Interview Michael Powell

The expense of naturalism

R.Collins
& I. Christie

One needs no particular 'politique' to justify attention to Michael Powell; his work constitutes the only coherent body of film in the British cinema to date. Making fifty films in an industry notorious for its uncertainty, contradictions and contraction is remarkable enough. More important though, is the impressive variety: an operatic cinema that in **The Red Shoes, Tales of Hoffmann, Bluebeard's Castle** invites comparison with the musicals of Minnelli and Cukor, a series of political and ideological films located chiefly in the 'forties, an almost Godardian meta-cinema in **Peeping Tom** — each form of film-making Powell has chosen is unique in Britain and an original contribution to the cinema as a whole.

It is a reproach both to the British film industry and to British film criticism that Powell has had to do good by stealth for so long. His work demonstrates what the British cinema could be, and one notes with regret that there are not more films like **The Small Back Room, Black Narcissus, A Matter of Life and Death, The Read Shoes** or **Peeping Tom,** and that Powell's diagnosis of naturalism as the enemy has not been more wiedly translated into an effective strategy.

There's one theme accross your films which strikes me very forcibly, watching them, which is the theme of artistic creation, of the strains and the agony of artistic creation.

Does that come out in several films?

I think it does. It comes out in The Red Shoes, Tales of Hoffmann —

Oh well, that's the theme of **The Red Shoes.**

In Peeping Tom, *too. And most interestingly in* Age of Consent, *where somehow the artist figure has a quite different status to that he has in the other films.*

Yes. The only failure of **Age of Consent** was that the artist himself was not original enough.

Well, we were very curious about that. There's a sense in which the things that he actually does are rather uninteresting and unsatisfactory.

I thought that let the film down.

Would you like them to be different from what they were? There's one shot, if I recall, where Mason is actually standing with his canvas on the beach and Helen Mirren is standing in the water and it's a deliberately composed shot, it seems to hover almost between slight absurdity and a kind of universality. It looks like being almost a confrontation between the painter and the subject but there's also something very literal about it. I wonder if that was intended to suggest a hint of parody?

I don't think it was, it was just that I wasn't getting what I wanted, I think that's how you'd sum it up.

Is this something that you're not particularly conscious of yourself, that you pursue this sort of theme across a number of films?

No, I certainly wouldn't pursue it, I mean I wouldn't shove it in — it's part of my life, I suppose.

For instance, if you take The Small Back Room *which is a film I like very much, it seems very like one of the films about art because in a way the central character there is a kind of artist — he has a very intense, subjective approach —*

He's dedicated.

— and he lives on an emotional knife edge. And in some ways it's a better film about art, I think, than a lot of films about art, because it conveys the sort of single-minded obsession, and he runs the risk of disintegrating, literally.

I would accept that.

What about your project of The Tempest? *I would have thought that this is again about the status of the artist, the status of the creator.*

Yes, I think it will be done eventually but up till now all the budgets have cost too much, and I can't really get the budget down until I find the right man to collaborate wth me on what I want to do. Gerald Scarfe who was going to do a lot of the monsters and masks and things in it, he's never been a film designer and he hasn't got the technical knowledge, although a very good technical creator, to take the huge jump that I want to take away from naturalism. You see what is at the moment or what has been steadily ruining films for the last twenty years is the expense of naturalsm. The average producer only understands naturalism, if he understands that; — I'm talking about producers not directors. I think the reason why there are such poor directors on the whole today is because there has been such a saturation of films on their eyes and minds that it comes to the point when they can look at anything and think "Oh well, I can do that and do it better.' Well, it' not so easy as that. It's exactly the same in painting, or in any art really, if you get to the point, you know, where you've seen so much that you think there's nothing to it. And you can only be relaxed if you gather round you such a stupendous team of technicians and craftsmen that they're all contributing just as you are and you're only controlling it all as Lermontov was in **The Red Shoes.**

Do you feel the loss of a team of very talented collaborators such as you had in The Red Shoes *and* Tales of Hoffmann, *do you feel that it's harder now for you because you can't assemble the same kind of team around you.*

Yes. Very definitely. If you all understand each other then you can produce a **Matter of Life and Death.** But if you don't, if you don't all have confidence and understand each other, you can't.

I wonder if that's got anything to with the fact that the last two of your films have been in Australia.

Certainly with, well not the first one. **They're a Weird Mob,** because that was merely a romp in Australia in the early American manner, in other words it was a take-off of the early American film the — **Ruggles of Red Gap,** for instance — exactly like it, except I'm not such a good director of the human comedy as Leo McCarey, I think it's just heaven — there are very few McCareys. But it had the same quality generally and I was quite pleased with it.

It seems to me that one of your great contributions to the British cinema has been a kind of attack on naturalism and a refusal to rest content with naturalism and a constant attempt to try to go beyond it.

Yes, that was at first purely visual and artistic but now it is absolutely economic. Unless we are able to tell a film completely without naturalism I don't see any future for any budget for any film.

When you say naturalism you mean the naturalism that requires a lot of location shooting.

Yes, not only that but a lot of necessarily real things which are just there because they're real. In the early days of the cinema you see it was true that a tree was a tree, shoot it in Central Park. But now if you go to shoot a tree in Cental Park you take a crew of eighty with you, you see what I mean?

It seems to me that one of your great kind of leaning in your work towards German stories, subjects —

Not particularly German, I've always been in the Common Market culturally, and I know much more about France and French literature than I do about German. Only, it has just so happened that it's been, I suppose through association with the Hungarians, you know Korda and his brothers, Emeric and his friends — that slants you towards Central Europe and Germany if something comes up. This film which I think we're going to do, is a German/Yugoslav co-production, but that just happens to be, not because I wanted to do it, but because it's a very good Yugoslav story which the Germans also want to do. And I think everybody's had this experience that although they would like to work in France. the language difficulty of writing particularly, the creative part of the language difficulty is far more difficult in France than it is between us and German. I read mostly French literature and of course there's no comparison either in the style or the attitude of French literature with English.

In your films the foreigners characteristically do seem to be Germans rather than French or Italians.

Possibly they might have been because I go back to the early days of cinema when the Germans were a big influence, the Germans and Russians were the greatest influence in the cinema — of Europe — and I'm really a European, I'm not particularly English and I'm certainly not American.

I think that's one of the things that we admire most about your wartime films, the generosity and the clarity with which you do present Germans.

Well, a lot of that was due to Pressburger. He was clever enough, he knew the Germans very well, and he was quite clever enough to know that the only way to get the Germans by the soft underbelly, is to portray them as they are and then suddenly turn a somersault.

So you're saying that the good Germans one sees in the wartime films, the Walbrook figure in Colonel Blimp *and the baker and the Hutterite community in* 49th Parallel, *they're there for explicitly propagandist reasons?*

No, it's because a German, taken out of Germany becomes less hysterical and more creative. You see this in the Expressionist painters and the Mannerist painters — as long as they go on talking to each other and banging their heads on their canvasses —

There is one film which is not I suppose strictly yours, you prdouced it, The Silver Fleet, *I don't know how closely you were involved in it —*

Very closely. I haven't seen it since we made it but it was quite a good little film.

I watched The Silver Fleet *not knowing that you hadn't directed it and I was really surprised at the end to see that it was directed by Vernon Sewell, but I thought I could see your hand and more than your hand in it.*

Well, I certainly didn't stand over him,

it's just that I suppose the attitude and the conception — attitudes are everything, aren't they? and style.

I think a lot of your films are about values, even about ultimately, political values.

About values, yes. It always puzzles me that people don't realize how many of our films were entirely original. In the history of films this is extraordinary. That people should make a run together of sixteen films of which ten or eleven were entirely original. Except for Chaplin which is different, almost a different medium. I don't think it can have happened. If it had happened more often I think the cinema would be a happier and better place. But that refers back to during the war — every single film we made was made on a general premise of what would be entertainment in a year's time. And so when we made **I know where I'm going,** it was a film that we decided to make about moral and material values. **A Canterbury Tale** was specifically about the difference between a materialist and the ordinary person you know. The Denis Price character was *the* materialist. It was specifically about that. He was the one we regarded as the materialist, the downright man who has a reason for everything.

Yes. But when he reaches the Cathedral the suggestion is that he's aware of other values.

Well, it didn't quite happen like that; remember there was a scene on the train where Culpepper has quite a long talk with the soldier for the first time really, in which their conflicting views are very carefully expressed. And at the end of which he gives up and says' Well, what do you think that I am?' And Culpepper says 'Perhaps you're an instrument.' It's a very important line. And he says 'I'll believe that when I see a halo around my head'. And the train runs out of the tunnel and hs halo appears. So he doesn't know what's happening to him, but it starts to happen when, as a pilgrim, he reaches Canterbury Cathedral. So it doesn't in other words — he doesn't go to do it, it happens to him because he's a pilgrim.

Is this interest in the exploration of moral and material values the reason why so many of your films seem to be set more on the peripheries of British life — in the Northern Isles, in the Hebrides, Tibet and far-flung areas of the Empire. Is it that you think that it's in those kind of areas, at the fringes, where the conflict, the struggle is most apparent? Or do you think it's misleading to say that that is a characteristic?

Yes. It's a very good question. It isn't true of course, because the same struggle goes on in the centre of London.

Yes. But it's very rarely that your films are, if you like, about the centre of London.

Very rarely.

Literally one of the only one of your films that seems to be really in the centre of London is Peeping Tom, *isn't it? The only one I can think of.*

Can't call Melbury Road the centre of London.

He does appear in what might be Soho.

I was just thinking it is a most interesting question, and I'm damned if I can answer it at the moment. Whether it was that the theme was easier to develop in a very simple setting, whether it was the early training which was always to go out and photograph something new.

The thing whch in fact put me on to this question was something you say in the Foula book. I think the quotation is: 'The conquest of Nature by Civilization is a fine thing, it is always printed in big capitals. But what good is Civilization if it drives the strong, hardy, independent people back from the outposts to live in towns.' But is it as simple as that? There seems a real disgust and despair with towns, as if nothing healthy can come out of or develop there.

No, That was really referring to this specific case.

You said in passing that you'd always wanted to make a film of Kipling's story 'They' — was that a serious project or an aberration?

Yes, yes, I think it was a serious project. I'm a mad Kipling fan and somebody, now who was it?, well, somebody seeing the retrospective of my films and afterwards, not before, she read afterwards quite a lot of Kipling's long short stories, and she said 'O I see where an awful lot of your images and people come from.' She said that she recognized very many things that are taken for granted in Kipling were taken for granted in my pictures. This had never occurred to me, because it was so much in my early days, this reading of Kipling; and it never occurred to me to ever make — and probably this is the reason — to make a film of a Kipling story, simply because I regard them so much as stories. But 'They' particularly is one of the few Kipling stories which could make a marvellous film.

Do you know his novel 'The light that failed'?

Oh yes.

You must, of course. It seems to me that's not too far removed from the atmosphere of some of your films like The Red Shoes.

Yes, so it must be a very strong influence, of Kipling. It's a very dangerous thing to say in an interview because the average person associates Kipling with Jingoistic sentiments and probably hard cruel military cantonments and all that sort of thing. But of course he was a much more complex person that that. He was also a very good poet, on his good days. I mean Yeats and Eliot, well Eliot had more good days than Yeats. —

I think Eliot probably selected his good days very carefully for record.

Which you're not able to do always in films. I've always gone on consciously growing up and living in films, never using films as a medium. When I was — I was sixteen — in 1921 I read in this magazine the description of people making films I said 'This is for me', that was all, and ever since then I've just grown up with films. But of course I hadn't grown up only knowing films. I was very quickly involved in film-making which in those days was not necessarily show business, but I was always mad about the theatre, and these things combine. I see an enormous amount of theatre all over the world and opera and everything, but I see very few films. And I only go to see films when I want to be humble, and stagger out thinking I could never have done that. Then immediately I think how I could have done it better.

I was intrigued by the preface to your book 'Graf Spee' where I think you say that the book needs to be written because it's a more enduring form than the cinema. Now does that come out of a sense of despair, that you're never going to get anything else started, that you're never going to be able to do the kind of films that you want?

Well, every artist feels that after he's just done something.

It seems a curious thing for you to say though, that literature, the printed word is more enduring and more important than the cinema — for someone who says 'I live the cinema, I live in the cinema'.

I think every now and then a wave of despair sweeps over me about distributors.

What kind of future do you see for the British cinema — any at all?

Oh yes, and for the cinema generally, yes. I would expect to see the cinema in the next fifty years move away from big business entirely into it's proper form which is an art form. And I would expect to see people regard making a film exactly like writing a book or painting a picture and I would expect to see a very simple and easy way to make a film with mini cameras and mini lights and everything so easy for an enthusiastic team of three or four people to tell a story. I expect to see much more of this. And I expect to see this as the main pattern of story by film. The book which I'm making notes for and assembling all my archives and things for is called 'The Story-tellers'.

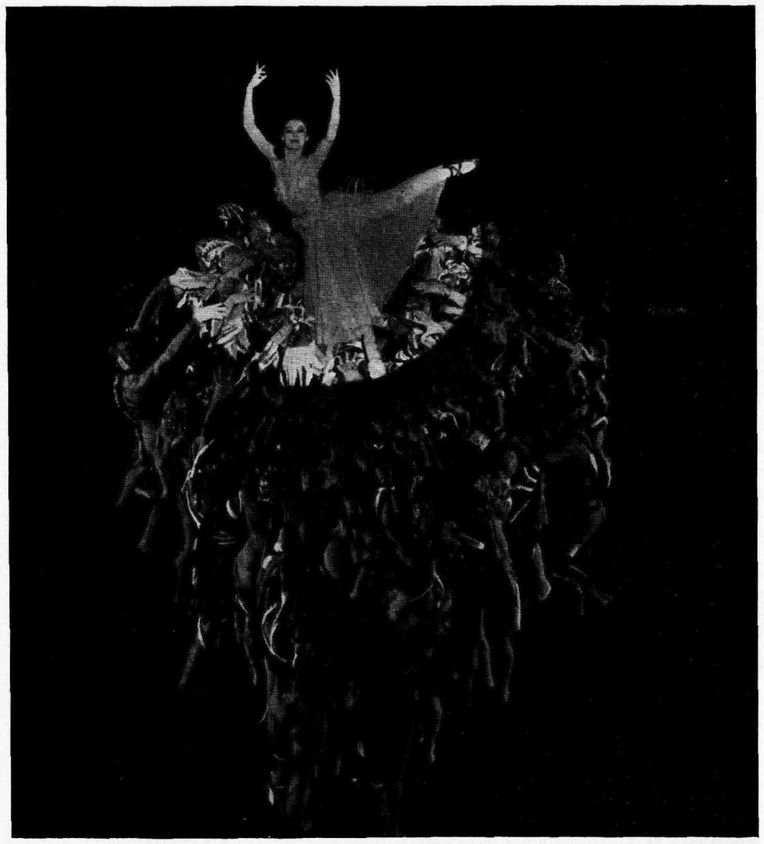
I was reading the book of Stravinsky's 'Conversations' and in it he mentioned a project that I gather you had put to him in I think it was 1952, to do some scenes from the 'Odyssey' in the form of a kind of Masque I think he said.

Nausicaa episode with Odysseus. Dylan Thomas was writing the words.

How did you conceive this — what form would it have taken, had it come off?

Well, I became enthusiastic in the idea of — which of course is coming up now — which is that out of all the creative artists in the world whom you could really call the top creative artists, perhaps five per cent have worked in the cinema, ninety-five pe rcent have never worked in the cinema — and I thought after the success of **The Red Shoes** and **Tales of Hoffmann** which interested painters and poets all over the world — that I could

get together a group of staggering people — well I had the obvious people like Picasso and Graham Sutherland as painters and other people too, poets like Dylan Thomas. And I said 'We will give you twenty hours of entertainment in colour, but some of the stories will be two hours long and some may be two minutes, I can't tell you exactly because you see you can't get a really first-rate artist to work in the cinema because there's no place for him. If you're going to work on a feature film your salary is so-and-so, if you're going to work on a short your salary is nothing, it's more or less that, you know, if you're going to work on an experimental film it's minus. This is the general attitude towards the most creative story-tellers in paint or verse or writing or anything. And I knew I could get anybody I wanted on these terms, if only somebody would back it. And one of the projects was this short episode from the episode in the *Odyssey* when Ulysses is washed ashore and Nausicaa and her maidens come down to sea-shore, you remember, to wash the linen and they were going to dance on the linen in order to beat it out, and we had a hymn and I wanted Stravinsky to do the music and Dylan the words. Graham Sutherland, for instance, wanted to make a detective story in the reeds at



Moira Shearer in **The Red Shoes**

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

the mouth of the Var in Nice. In those days there used to be reeds at the mouth.

You seem to have had a great deal of freedom and a great deal of control over your films.

Yes, and when I didn't it was a disaster.

Is that characteristic of film production in Britain as opposed to what it was in the States. And was that what essentially kept you in Britain, rather than going to the States, like Hitchcock?

Yes. Because I'm not a real folk genius like Hitchcock, you see. I work with the materials that are there and I try to get the best. If they're not the best I fall on my face, you see. Hitchcock is really a folk genius. He's a Cockney at loose in the world, and every now and again it works marvellously. When it doesn't, out comes a **Marnie** or something like that, because Hitch is bored — I'm very fond of Hitch. He was the first director I worked with when I came from France. We became friends then and have been friends ever since.

You said that two films of yours that have been interfered with most were A Canterbury Tale *and* The Small Back Room.

I didn't say they'd been interfered with, because people were still afraid of us then. But they did ask us to cut sequences. But they wouldn't have dared to have come onto the set because if they had I'd have stopped work.

You did say in connection with Phantom Light, *I think you were talking to Kevin Gough-Yates, that it gave you an opportunity to use 'visual shocks', visual notes and shocks. I don't know if the phrase means anything to you. But it does seem to identify something in a lot of your films for me which is a use of a often very anti-naturalistic device, to shock the audience, to really startle them at some point.*

Yes. As far as I remember I was left alone entirely to make it — that's probably why I said I had more opportunity on it. As long as I made it and delivered it on the budget, nobody cared very much what I did with it.

There's a tremendous sequence of almost Russian cutting, as I would think of it.

Yes, it was the only way to do it.

You've got the pistons of the ship, the bows of the ship, the light itself, all cut in a big montage — very Russian style really. It looked like you were having some fun on that.

Well, it was the only way I could do it — wasn't enough money.

But, much later than that, when you had much more control over your films, this seems to hold true. If there is one characteristic of your films, right across the decades, it is a wish to disturb the audience at times, often by a very striking visual single shot or something that really disconcerts them. Something like the eyelid closing in A Matter of Life and Death — *the most extreme example.*

Yes.

But there similar sorts of examples in lots of the films. Was this ever something you consciously worked out, an idea of jolting the audience?

No, I should think it's probably from early influences in Europe. German and Russian, and French. Yes, German probably more than Russian.

Even in Black Narcissus *I think the magnificent final sequences are almost like something out of a German picture, a UFA film.*

Are they?

Yes, well it's when the nun returns to the convent. The composition is very very striking, because one knows it's all done in the studio, which I still find hard to believe — it is really rather reminiscent of, say, one of Lang's big spectaculars in the twenties.

Well, that's partly owing to Alfred Junge.

Had Junge worked in Germany as a designer, as a film designer specifically?

Oh yes. He's one of the great technicians of the cinema.

He hadn't been a painter like Heckroth.

No, he was a film art director who developed — his great passion in art, being a German, was Dürer. It's a shame he's dead now, he would have gone to the Dürer Nuremberg exhibition this year. But he was a dedicated film designer. He came — I think his wife was Jewish but he was not — but I think he came with E A Dupont to this country, that's the only reason he came. Because he was E A Dupon't film designer — **Variete.**

You were using German-trained and German-based art directors. This seems to set them aside from so much that was being done in Britain. I wonder if this was regarded as being something rather foreign and exotic — were you regarded as being unique in your preference for using Alfred Junge and people like him?

No, because Alfred Junge, for the three or four years before the war, had been chief designer for MGM British here, and after the war indeed went back to them as chief designer. He was the the desiger of **Goodbye Mr. Chips, The Citadel, A Yank at Oxford.**

Is it fair to say that you encouraged him perhaps to be more individual, more so than in his other films?

We were both trained in the great European tradition of design and cinema, where everything is possible and has to be done in the most perfect way possible. For instance, he always found, as I did, English studios disgusting because they let all the dust accumulate on the overhead girders and if you have any big bang or explosion or somebody drops a set or two, then a deluge of dust descends upon you. This is typical of a British studio. A German studio would be vacuum cleaned probably every month and the floor would be oiled, everything would be spotless. It would be run like a German theatre was run — how I would expect a theatre to be run, and how I've never seen a theatre in this country run. We were both perfectionists, in other words, and trained properly in a very great tradition.

I am reminded of something Fritz Lang said once in an interview, he said that when he went to the States, to Hollywood, he found not that Hollywood was inferior to the facilities he had at UFA but rather that he could do more in Hollywood. He gave one example; he said that nobody had ever heard of a boom at Ufa, and this was commonplace in Hollywood, and you could move the camera much better. Do you think that's true? Does that suggest that maybe UFA wasn't as great as it's always said to be.

No, I think it was a great film-producing centre, but you are talking about the introduction of sound, where probably the Germans may have been working on directional microphones or press microphones and didn't want booms. Anybody who wants a boom anyway needs his head examined. In the early days of sound films, of course it was wonderful to have these flexible booms which at least gave you an arc of ten feet. Then of course they invented telescopic booms which shot the microphone out to thirty feet. They're still a perfect anachronism, like trotting a dinosaur around with you. If sound men were worth their salt in the first eighteen months they would have invented tiny mikes which picked up everything that was necessary without being visible. But they went happily on with bigger and bigger booms.

Am I right in thinking that you were having a bit of fun at the expense of English or very rigid styles of shooting in Peeping Tom *in the studio sequences?*

Yes, a bit.

Where you show, you really send up the whole process a bit.

A bit. Well, there didn't seem any other way to do it, you know. Film people anyway, filming film people — theres' something doubly artificial about it.

That appealed to you in Peeping Tom?

Well, I decided to send the whole thing up anyway. In other words you saw a lot of idiots in command and a lot of dedicated technicians very quietly moving around. That was the point.

Yes, that's one of the things that comes through from the film. Your hero is, after all, a technician.

I'm a technician, not a visible idiot. There are always directors like that. I remember reading a lovely story of a safari in Africa; they would come to a different village, you know, and there would be a big Ngoma put on for you, a big native show. And he very soon noticed the different kinds of producers of the show who were the Chiefs. Sometimes the Chief would be out front 'Ho Wa Ho Wa Ho Wa' and oiled all over — in front of everything, you know. Sometimes he would see a very worried little character whizzing around the back and saying 'No, no, no, come in that way, Oh you bloody fool, you've ruined the whole thing' you know. This is me.

You talked about your successful films being the product of a happy collaboration. Do you think that the achievement of the early German cinema and of the American cinema during the thirties and forties and perhaps the early fifties, is due to there being this established studio system — a lot of very skilled and intelligent and dedicated people available for collaboration?

Frederic Ashton in **Tales of Hoffman.**

No, it was close collaboration with the other arts, the theatre and painting.

You titled your lecture at the NFT 'The Beauty of Image' and it's clear that the way you speak of the art directors and the evidence in the films that you are very interested in the visuals of the film. What kind of ratio do you prefer working in? Three of your films have been in some kind of wide screen process. You've done some work in television — do you make any distinction between the kind of thing you like working in. Do you like Cinemascope?

Well, no, not very much. The American Cinemascope of course is better because it has very little distortion, if you're careful. But most of these other 'scopes like the Russian one, have such colossal distortion, it's just ridiculous. I went to see this potted version of **The Big Battle** the other night, and they were using the 'scope system, and as soon as people stepped off the centre of the picture they became like in a distorting mirror. No, on the whole I think the academy screen is the best. What I've always been against, all my life, is projecting it in the cinema with a black surround.

Really? What would you prefer instead of that?

I'd like a photo-electric cell sympathetic surround for colour films, so that the overall tone that was on the screen wouldn't suffer.

Like the way Seurat framed his pictures.

I nearly got Rank to adopt it at a time when they were really spending money on technical developments and I was in charge of that, technical developments on the camera side. Korda always said and I don't know how much he knew, because Korda was such a tremendous showman, he said I was the greatest technician that he'd ever known. I can do almost anything, given the right collaborators. I never am in the least worried about anything, you know.

In Oh Rosalinda *you actually exploit the qualities of the poor Cinemascope.*

Yes. The lenses were not very sharp, were they? We certainly tried. I thought using very defective lenses at that time we were a bit too daring.

You were having a bit of fun with the Cinemascope in the drunken sequence in Oh Rosalinda *where you actually tilt the lens, don't you?*

Yes. That's right. In those days the lenses besides being somewhat defective in sharpness, also had a focal depth that was fantastically small. Five feet, six feet, something like that.

The Queen's Guards *looks again very odd, if I may say so, because at times, especially in the parade ground sequences you use Cinemascope in a very rectilinear fashion, very four-square — of course it's the subject matter — but I found that interesting because you're not trying to distract attention from the fact that it is such an odd shape, you're almost using it, drawing attention to it.*

Yes — it was quite a problem with the parade ground.

Lang says, the things he likes about

Hollywood, was that there were a lot of very skilled and intelligent and competent people with whom to work. And this is the way he accounts for the success and his sense of satisfaction with many of his American films.

Well, I don't know what Lang may have meant. He had an enormous sense of humour and he was an absolutely darling man. I think he mainly meant that when he wanted something done it was done absolutely superlatively. He's not a shouting, bawling Preminger you know, or an egomaniac genius like Stroheim. Lang is a marvellous man, and he found that everything he asked for was immediately produced, and done very well. This of course was staggering to him because a European director is accustomed, practically, to do everything himself.

And that's the way it is in Britain, is it, you have to do everything yourself, struggle pretty hard to get what you want?

Mostly, I think, yes. When I say do everything yourself it means that you have to. For instance, the Rank organization of course, started this way with groups of dedicated people like our own people in the Archers and the people in Cine Guild, you know, the John Bryan, Ronnie Neame, David Lean, Anthony Havelock Allen group, Sidney Gilliatt, Frank Launder and their friends — another group. It was only when the Rank Organization became big business and bought all the Odeons and all that sort of thing that they started to follow the Hollywood pattern of saying 'The director just directs that, and the trick department does that; the editor reports to somebody else' — this is the Hollywood method. And in the case of a great director like Lang I'm sure he was able to buck the method. What entranced him and fascinated him was I think the technical skill and the money behind it, in the service of artist.

And he certainly had a lot of very bad experiences with the front office.

Well, you see, after this first thing of course he would find this coming up. They always welcome you to Hollywood and give you everything you want on your first picture, and afterwards the shadows of the prison-house close around the dangerous boy.

Could we ask you to talk a bit generally. Do you have any feelings about the state of the British cinema? Good tendencies you see in it, or bad tendencies or any kind of immediate future.

I think it's gone back a great deal to a rather defiant amateurism.

Which is a good thing, you think?

Bad thing. I'm not sympathetic to amateurs of any kind.

Are there any particular films or people who have started working in Britain recently who seem to you to be promising?

Yes, Christopher Miles in **The Virgin and the Gypsy.** Outstanding talent, as I understand it — should deelop enormously. Because the good thing are very very good and the bad things are very, very bad.

Any others that you feel the same way about?

Well, I liked Seth Holt very much, but he's dead. Of course, I admire Joe Losey as a film-maker, but I find he's never quite in an English skin, that's all, otherwise he's just marvellous.

Another man who's got this series of regular collaborators, with Pinter and Bogarde and Richard MacDonald.

Yes, it certainly helps. Schlesinger I think has a great talent. I thought the one he did in the North, **A Kind of Loving,** a beautiful film. I didn't like **Darling** but I like **A Kind of Loving.** He's a very honest, marvellous fellow.

What about Reisz, do you like Reisz's work?

Well, he's only brought off **Morgan,** really. Lovely talent, but he doesn't seem to be able to come to terms with, well, who could, in the last five or six years it's been very, very difficult for really creative people. There's been too much money in the country in the wrong hands, too much power in the wrong places. A man as clever as Reisz who makes a big success like that is going to get talked into things that he shouldn't do.

It's interesting that British musicals or British films with music and dance having a central part, seem to be coming back into the cinema these days, like Isadora, *and some of Ken Russell's work.*

He's a lovely monster, isn't he, Ken Russell? I was told by somebody in Australia that he had agreed to direct 'Voss' in Australia, you know Patrick White's book. Whether it's just one of those things or not, I don't know. But I imagine he knows what he wants.

What's your German/Yugoslav co-production going to be about?

Oh, it might come off. I've got, well actually, mentioning **The Virgin and the Gypsy,** the composer of the music there which I thought was very good. I saw him afterwards, and I thought he was very talented, and he's doing the music for it. It's a rather gentle, funny story, a Yugoslav story, a sort of Hans Andersen story, of a small boy, not so small, fourteen or so, who is a shoemaker's apprentice, and he gets in trouble because a pair of boots is too small and he has them thrown at him and he gets very injured. He decides to put the boots on because they fit him alright and go out into the world and break them in. He meets another child, a girl, who's been left behind by a Circus and is trekking on to catch up with the Circus again. It sounds rather like a sort of early Duvivier, doesn't it? And they do, eventually catch up with the Circus and the Fair and it all works out a bit differently — there's a big chase at the end. And in the end they all come back again — there and back again — a sort of Yugoslav Hobbit. He goes through some quite amusing adventures but I think it will be — in other words it won't be a funny peasants or that sort of thing, it will be a rather gentle picture, I think. The music's developing very well.

It sounds as if you've almost started from the idea of what the music should be like.

Well, such a story is bound to really, because, you see, lyrics have to be written against the progression of the story. Also you've got a problem that the story takes place somewhere in the time of the Austrian Empire, about 1905. The boy is a very well known, he's a Dutch boy actually, he's a terrific German singing star called Heintie. I went to see him, he's a very nice boy, mad about horses. Very good boy. He's just about that age between a child and a man, you know, which is rather good. But everything depends on the musical pattern really, because I saw all the locations they'd picked. They're quite good, very much down-to-earth sort of stuff.

Is it fair then to ask you how this is going to avoid the trap of naturalism, that you're going to shoot on location?

Partly by costumes and partly by the treatment, I think. No, it certainly won't avoid the taint of naturalism. It has to be worked mainly from the music, the music has to be the master. They produced a script full of descriptions and dialogue and things like that which I timed roughly, it was about three and a half to four hours. So when it seemed as if they really were going to do it and had the money, I did them a shooting script which cut it down to size, which really reduced all the scenes to a few lines, put all the onus on the music and occasional singing. William Sansom is a marvellous lyric writer, very good novelist, short story writer, he's writing the lyrics.

I hope it does come off. I hope The Tempest *does come off I'm very much looking forward to seeing what you do with that.*

Yes. I think it will, you know, a lot of people are going for it. I think with luck we shall probably get it going next March or so, March or April. But up to now we've wasted a year on various attempts to set up a financial pattern wchich would work. And meanwhile I've been waiting for Leo Marks to finish writing *The Nailers,* which we're going to do together. You know he wrote **Peeping Tom,** yes, this is again original. It's a beautiful idea, and just as terrifying and highly unwelcome, except they can't resist it, the boys who put up the money, as **Peeping Tom** was in its day. I wanted to call it 'The Worst Years of our Live', which I think is a wonderful title, but he was a bit scared of that so we called it *The Nailers.*

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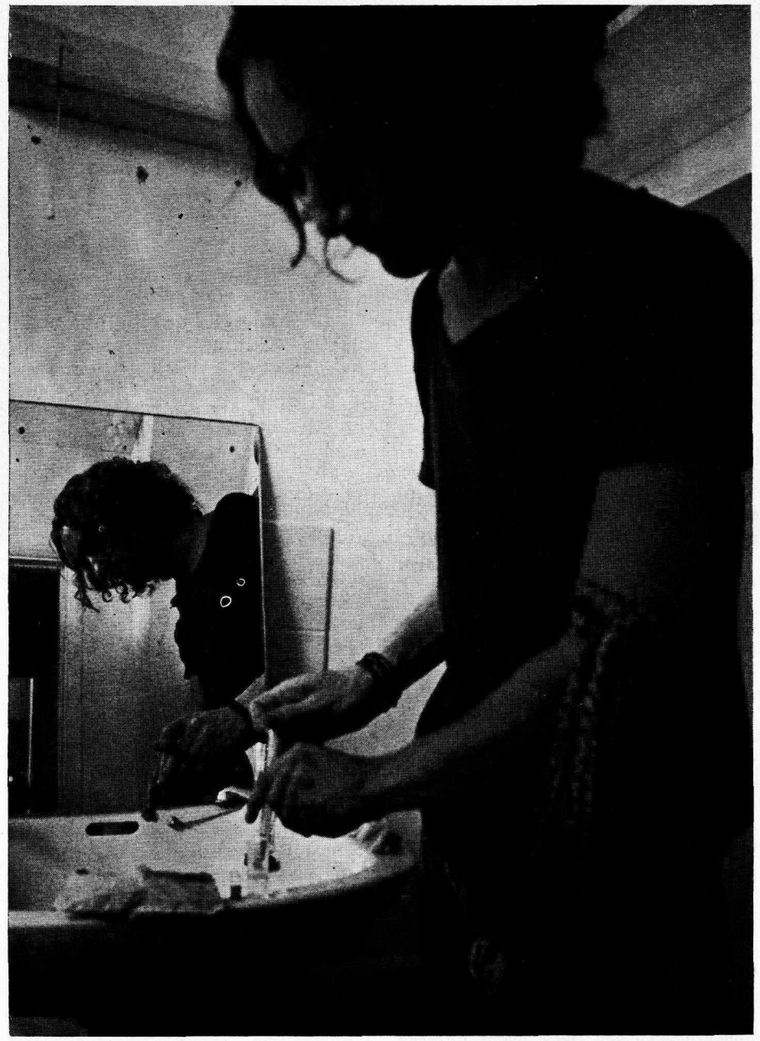
Thomas Elsaesser

I remember first reading about you in connection with picketing a Royal Performance to protest against your film having been taken off and not being given proper distribution elsewhere. What were your problems with British Lion over the distribution of Bronco Bullfrog?

After we had finished the film, that is, cut the picture and produced an independent soundtrack, we showed the film to John Boulting, who liked the picture very much and offered to distribute it for us. Naturally, we were very pleased, because we thought we had at last found someone who would take the job of selling and distributing the film out of our hands. Boulting wanted a few changes, and I spent a day with him in the cutting room. He also wanted the picture re-dubbed. Well, there were a few changes we didn't mind making — after all, if Boulting really liked the film and was willing to help us, it seemed a bit mean not to give him a little say in how the picture would finally look. For example, the freeze-frame at the end was his idea, I simply wanted a cut, but he said, no, you can't do that, what you need is a freeze-frame. OK, so we did a freeze-frame, more to please him than because we were convinced. He then let us use the studio and equipment down at Shepperton for the re-dubbing, and eventually a married print, that is, one with picture and sound on the same film strip, was made.

But by that time, Boulting, I think, was already fed up with us, he thought we argue too much, and he went round saying that he had spent £7.000 to complete our picture, implying that we had come to him, as inexperienced beginners, asking him to help us finish our job. Which is one of those distributors' myths, and in our case simply wasn't true. He spent £3.000, but that was because he wanted to change the film, not because it wasn't completed. We obviously resented the implication that our producer was incompetent. In fact, he brought the film in well under budget. We had £20.000 for **Bronco Bullfrog,** and it cost us only about £18.500 when it was finished. When the film came to be released, Boulting had completely lost interest, and probably couldn't care less about how it was put out. It opened at the Cameo Poly at a time when building work was going on in the cinema, and it had to come off after two-and-a-half weeks to make way for the Royal Performace of the **Three Sisters.** Obviously, that kind of treatment is bound to kill a film, especially from an unknown director and with no stars. So despite very good reviews the film disappeared. We then did a bit of publicity on our own, and **Bronco Bullfrog** got written about in all the papers, which didn't exactly endear us to Mr. Boulting. At the Cameo Poly, and on British Lion's calculation of a two-and-a-half week run, **Bronco Bullfrog** could not possibly have made anything but a loss. They claim to have spent £4.000 — and they probably did — on advertising, posters, etc. The majority of film distributors, when they open in the West End, actually calculate not to make money, because their aim is to get the film on general release. Very often, you're committed in your contract to spend anything between £3.000 and £5.000 a week on publicity — and that isn't really helping anybody, except the people who stick up the posters.



As fragile and brittle as a piece of glass **(Private Road)**

After you had finished your second film, Private Road, *you then decided to*

set up an independent distribution for it. How did this work in practice?

There are quite a few cinemas in London where you can put on a film, provided you guarantee the proprietor a fixed sum of money at the end of each week. It's called a 'house nut', and is presumably calculated to cover the running costs. In the case of the Notting Hill Gaumont, where we opened **Private Road,** it was £650 a week.

On the other hand (provided there isn't anything in the small print which we've overloked), the decision is ours when the film is to be taken off. And we haven't yet signed away the rights for **Private Road** as we did for **Bronco Bullfrog,** so whatever happens with our own distribution, we're free to consider other possibilities, like selling the film to television. The original agreement we had with British Lion on **Bronco Bullfrog** was far more favourable than the terms under which we are now operating, but in actual fact, quite a few of the agreement's stipulations were never fulfilled. For example, we were assured that Eady money would be paid directly to us, but two weeks before the film was to open, we received the standard contract, and there was of course no mention of the Eady money going to us, it went to British Lion. At the time, we were too anxious to see the film open to play tough, so we signed, though in retrospect that was a big mistake, and all we want now is to get **Bronco Bullfrog** back from British Lion, but they are asking £10.000 for it, and that we just haven't got.

How did you come to set up Maya Films, your production company?

Adam Barker-Mill, James Scott and myself formed a company — I honestly can't remember how long ago — five or six years ago — and we started making pictures rather like we make them now. by begging and borrowing money wherever we could lay our hands on. But we've always been very bad at selling our films. Then we were joined by Andrew St John, and together we set up Maya Films in its present form. together with a self-supporting facilities company.

How do you finance your films?

Through a merchant bank, and by knowing rich people. There is no other way at the moment, at least until some form of state money is made available. For example, I think the National Film Finance Corporation ought to be turned round immediately, they ought to have a policy that obliges them to co-finance at least ten pictures a year, with budgets of up to £40–50.000. That I would consider a good government policy. They could well pursue other things at the same time but by being committed to this number of films, with half the money coming from outside sources they would be really helping to create an area of low cost independent film-making, something which has never existed in Britain.

Presumably you set up Maya Films in order to make films yourself. Have you ever considered whether your company might one day be in a position to offer production facilities to other directors as well?

O yes. But it is a terribly difficult thing to do. This is certainly what we are working towards, both in terms of production and distribution, the idea being that eventually the film industry and opportunities to make films will become generally more accessible to everyone.

Do you feel at all conscious of belonging to a certain tradition of film-making?

No. The way Adam and I make films is very much the result of our own chance experience. I started in feature films — editing — and therefore learnt the basics of film-making. Adam actually studied film, he is a bit more knowledgeable, but even so, he is very pragmatic in his approach. The most important influence for me has not come from film at all, but from Joan Littlewood and her theatre in Stratford. I once edited a short for her — that was after she had made **Sparrows can't sing,** which she herself didn't like and wanted to have destroyed.

How did you come to make Bronco Bullfrog?

Bronco Bullfrog came about as an extension of a documentary I was making about improvised drama based on what Joan Littlewood was doing in her theatre with local kids. It was there that I made contact with the people who were eventually to act in **Bronco Bullfrog.** It wasn't actually in the theatre, we were in a kind of barn, a warehouse which was leaking, cold and miserable. But all the same, she tried to make the kids do some acting, just to give them an opportunity to do something with their time — they were all about fifteen, they had just left school and were rather bored of an evening. That's when we made **Everybody is an Actor, Shakespeare said,** which is quite — boisterous, but certainly not educational in the way it was supposed to be. I wanted to make a film quite seriously about improvised drama in schools, but it got rather chaotic.

Private Road *was made with professional actors. How did this compare with* Bronco Bullfrog?

It is very difficult for me to compare the two films in this respect, because the experience of making **Private Road** was a particular one. It wasn't just that there were professional actors. lots of other factors contributed to making the film a rather difficult experience for me. In any case, I intend to make cheaper films in future, and I shall probably revert to 16mm, which I think is perfectly adequate. This is important if we're talking about independent production, because you can make your film on 16mm. blow up the copies to 35mm, and present them as entirely legitimate feature films — provided you have a really first-rate cameraman like Adam. Today, you can make films entirely without reference to the system, but you can still show them in the ordinary way through cinemas.

To shoot 16mm is a third of the price of 35mm, and the blow-up makes it about half the price. **Private Road,** on the other hand, was made entirely within the rules, six weeks' shooting schedule, union crews, colour, etc., and it is a phantastic strain, I think the film suffered from this — of course, it also gained in other respects —, but I would not like to be in that position again, of having to make a film in six weeks with that kind of pressure on and that kind of money being spent every day. Because even though I didn't particularly think of the money — we were spending nearly £1.000 a day — somebody did. When one talks about an independent production, it sounds all very nice, but in actual fact, it wasn't all that independent. certainly not independent of money.

What kind of film would you like to make next?

The general opinion is that now after **Private Road** we ought to get enough money to make a film properly, stars, big budget etc and make a few bob so to speak. But I think absolutely the reverse, we ought to have little enough money in order to do it right, take our time over it, have as few people around as possible. The films that interest me, the films I want to make are quite particularly about the individual characteristics of human beings, and to that end, it isn't really possible to use professional actors. At the same time, I think of film primarily as a dramatic medium, and in many ways, **Bronco Bullfrog** is just the kind of film I enjoy making, except that it is probably not dramatic enough, and some of the people in it aren't quite right, I'm now confident one can do better than that. I want to make films which are on the one hand more dramatic, and on the other, less imposing on the people in it, less dependent on the director telling the actors every move and every gesture. I think the director's task ought to be more to create a framework, an atmosphere where the actors can be themselves.

You mention that you would like your films to be more dramatic. What kind of drama are you thinking of? — I'm asking this question because it struck me that in both your films, the dramatic implications of the material remained somewhat unresolved and even — this applies more to Private Road *— deliberately underexplored. Both films for example, end in a state of suspension. —*

— perhaps that's just because one hasn't decided yet. I do not necessarily think that drama implies a more precise ending, or perhaps what I mean is more tension, not drama.

If one is talking about drama in the conventional sense, one tends to think of psychological drama, of a conflict or clash between different interests, motives, modes of life and so on. Now it seems to me that in Private Road *this is there in, as it were, embryonic form — the young couple exposed to external and internal pressures. But what one gets is often a sense of tension, of unease, awkwardness, which is very well conveyed — in short, a kind of tension which is not normally associated with drama, but more almost with anti-, and even ciné vérité.*

Characters — and situations as well — start off in my mind as embodiments of this and that, but then I tend to look at them and think 'I never heard anyone say that' — so out it goes. I don't think the drama in either film can be resolved. The films are mainly about irresolution as the natural state of human beings, and both the films are intended as a criticism of society for requiring resolution from people.

An attractively a-social friend **(Bronco Bullfrog)**

How do you feel about 'genre' movie? The British cinema, especially in the '50s produced some excellent thrillers — by Losey, Seth Holt, Cliff Owen, Roy Baker, Cy Endfield — which often had a marvellous sense of place, of character and setting. I was wondering if this kind of cinema would appeal to you, where you can rely on a fairly strong plot and a dramatic framework, without having to impose too much of an emotional melodrama.

A 'genre' picture implies a strong, simple dramatic tension, which is on the one hand attractive and on the other, I think, might be attractive because it doesn't mean much. I'll probably try to make a picture based on a simple dramtic force one day — one with love, hate, jealousy, fear and all that. Gangster movies appeal to me a great deal, there is room there for a lot of the things I'm interested in. But **Villain** or the other one, **Get Carter** — they're like a lot of films today, clever and meaningless. The danger of drama is of course that the characters get warped when one makes them act in a certain way to fit the plot. The way I direct actors makes it very difficult to get them to do anything other than what for them seems to ring true. I think, for example, almost all the good parts in **Bronco Bullfrog** were due to the kids being left alone. And even so, there was still too much interference on my part, too much imposed on them.

I have a feeling you may be a bit too modest about your own contribution as a director and editor. For a start, the timing and the emphasis is often exceptionally sensitive and lucid in Bronco Bullfrog, *and a scene like the one where the motor-bike gets knocked over by a lorry is successful, it seems to me, by the way it is fitted into the overall movement of the film, for that gives it its deeper meaning — of small ambitions being suddenly reduced to nothing, and the sense of futility about trying to escape from a restrictive social milieu through affluence and material values. I grant you, it's the natural reticence of your actors as well as the distance you keep as a director which allows these scenes to 'work', but that they work on a variety of levels seems to me the greater achievement, and that depends on the mise-en-scene of the film, on the director's conception of its themes, I would have thought, rather more than on the actors being given scope to improvise.*

Actually, what the scene depended on was whether or not we could afford the bike . . .

You have been bracketed with Ken Loach, partly on the basis of sharing working-class subjects. Do you see any common ground between you?

I don't know him personally, but I rather admire him, I must say, the way he keeps himself to himself. I enjoyed **Cathy Come Home** and **Kes.** We probably have a common interest in social problems and reality, rather than psychological problems or entertainment that is escapist. I suppose I'm slightly more concerned with glamorous films than he is, he is a political person, and I'm not.

While watching Private Road, *I noticed how similar it is to* Bronco Bullfrog. *In both cases you have a hero, rather uncertain of who he is and what he wants to do, getting involved with a girl. Together they make a bid for freedom and independence — a motorized holiday in the country — which fails for one reason or another, whereupon the boy comes more and more under the influence of an attractively a-social friend (a juvenile delinquent in* Bronco Bullfrog, *a junkie drop-out in* Private Road), *and the films end with a token gesture of anti-social*

solidarity on the part of the hero (attacking the probation officer, stealing the electric typewriter), while both the girls are almost obsessively preoccupied with creating a 'home'. Were you conscious of the parallel while making Private Road?

Well, I suppose I did notice, at least everyone who was making it noticed how lazy I was, doing the same things twice. I ought to add, though, that to a certain extent **Private Road** was made with professional actors, in colour and with a full crew just to see what that implied, and in that sense it probably is almost something of a re-make.

I daresay, from the point of view of some future Platts-Mills scholar, you certainly display a remarkable degree of thematic consistency... But what struck me was that somehow the transposition into a different social milieu had slightly altered the meaning of the story, or at least, your own crtical evaluation of it. I felt at times that the situations didn't reveal as much about what was going inside the characters, and therefore seemed less convincing than in Bronco Bullfrog. *This may be a purely subjective impression, but I felt, for example, the fact that the hero of* Private Road *is a writer explains at once too much (about his social status, the fact that everybody is rather spoiling him) and too little (about what sort of person he really is) and there sesms finally no specific or necessary reason why he acts in one way rather than another, whereas in* Bronco Bullfrog *one clearly felt the relation between the hero's acts and the moral and social dead-end he is in and which blocks him off from coming to any meaningful decision.*

I think the situations in **Private Road** were as true, but what is wrong is the people. This brings us back to the question of professional actors, or perhaps more accurately, of using actors who don't know very well and who are out of their surroundings — that's what makes **Private Road** perhaps less true. In fact, the hero would block himself off rather than be blocked off by social circumstances, as in **Bronco Bullfrog.** And this is the problem. If one had got closer to a 'character' who was the central character, then it would have carried more conviction, say, if the person playing it had been in his own home. As it was, it was almost a Studio picture, there was so much imposed, and I really don't think I want to construct things that much again when making a film.

I can see that with professional actors you have to work out your script in a much more deterministic way, but some of the most convincing scenes in Private Road *seem to me those where the actors are given very little freedom. For instance, a scene which I personally thought very moving and dramatically successful was the one where the junkie shoots up in the couple's bathroom. For what one witnesses is the boy and the girl suddenly becoming estranged and self-conscious in their own flat. For the first time, they really have to confront themselves. The falling of the syringe into the wash-basin brings this tension to its necessary release, namely the girl collapsing into hysterics, and thus giving way to some overwhelming anxiety which is very much what the film is about. The idea of the sound of breaking glass seems to me an excellent piece of mise-en-scene, it not only makes the dramatic mood of the scene palpable, but it also defines the relation of the couple to each other — in truth as fragile and brittle as a piece of glass. Furthermore, one very strongly gets the sense of the disruptive role which unconventional behaviour plays within the confines of a bourgeois family set-up. When the syringe breaks, the whole fabric of mutual self-delusion breaks, and very logically, the girl throws a fit. I imagine that such a scene took quite some working out and rehearsing.*

Yes, that's a scene which worked, but there are a lot of scenes in the film that don't work. The one you mentioned is a solid scene, it lasts about twelve minutes or so. The problem is to create a drama out of a series of situations which are each inherently real. What has offended me most in English films has always been the lack of reality in the behaviour of people. I have let the dramatic element suffer in order to preserve the reality.

I think the early part of **Private Road** suffers from the fact that one doesn't get sufficiently inside the characters. There were indications in the script of what is meant to happen, and I was going on the assumption that one could do the same as one had done on **Bronco Bullfrog,** namely that the people were there, and that they were real, but in the event they didn't come over that way. You can't 'observe' professional actors, expect them to play themselves. The weakness was that one was trying to make a film which was semi-documentary, using people who were employed out of their circumstances. **Private Road** was much harder work for me than **Bronco Bullfrog**, with a fixed shooting schedule there was less time to think, less time for the imagination to really get into the scenes, and far more of the 'O God, another day' — which is of course the circumstances under which the majority of people work. And frankly, I'm not prepared to work under these pressures again. So far, with us it has always been very much what we could do under the circumstances, and with the experience of **Private Road** behind us, I'm fairly clear of what we can do as well as what we ought to do — and I'm under no illusions, it's going to be hard, I had rather wanted to avoid working outside the film-industry, because obviously ,it has enormous advantages — the whole thing is set up, admittedly rather badly and falling to pieces, but there is money available once you've got the go-ahead, there is some sort of structure which takes a lot of work off your back. However, I'm now pretty sure the system is unworkable, and it's rather sad, it means you have to think of somethink else.

In this respect your views coincide with those of some of the 'underground' film-makers. Do you agree with any of the aesthetic conclusions that have been drawn from such a position?

Although we used to make films that way, just the two of us and occasionally another person, we'd never really been 'underground'. I've always been rather concerned with the structure of the film-industry, because that's where I started working. I didn't have a theoretical interest in film before I had a practical interest in the job, and when I didn't like the way I had to work, I tried to change a few things to make the job better. But it's like a bus-conductor trying to take over London Transport... The other thing is that it's very hard to find out where the limits of the system are without having become committed to making films within the industry, because opportunities for making films are extremely rare, to say the least, so that the majority of people who ever learn what the limits are have already become completely limited themselves. I personally can't make films that way, I hate having to employ people, I'm not interested in having people around unless they have their own motives for being there — so that really does define the things I can do, and those I can't — and I might as well admit that to myself.

And yet you are attracted to the idea of 'glamorous' films.

Yes, glamorous in the sense of making entertainment pictures as opposed to documetaries or information films, and I like the combination of music and image in films. I'm not too happy with the music in either of my films, in both cases it's semi-documentary, it was imposed by a decision to use in one case an East End group who work in a pub there, and in the second case, the actors did the music themselves. What I mean by 'glamorous' I guess is really a bit of circus atmosphere, darkness, then sudden lights, the orchestra starts up and here we go... the element of the spectacular, excitement — and in that sense, **Bronco Bullfrog** isn't really exciting enough in places — what I want is the spectacular that people are capable of doing themselves. I think that's what Joan Littlewood wanted to do and did — *Oh what a Lovely War* on stage was almost the perfection of that combination of the spectacle and the real, and that's what I'm aiming for, and from that point of view neither of my films so far is particularly satisfactory.

We are trying to get new premisses which are mainly intended for work with actors, a kind of cinema workshop, if you like. And at present, I'm working on a story set in Fulham, which is quite a strong plot about somebody who lets everyone down, and that will be acted just by local people whom I have known for quite some time now. What I'm hoping to do is a vaguely Brechtian film, with songs and so on. But the only way I think it can be done is with amateur actors and having a regular working relationship with them, so that they really get involved themselves.

Book Review

A MIRROR FOR ENGLAND
by Raymond Durgnat
FABER & FABER
1971

'Tyler's close scrutiny of the films of the Forties makes him our age's central thinker if only because *in the decade between 1935 and 1945, no irrelevant film was made in the United States.*' Myra Breckinridge speaking, at the start of Gore Vidal's novel.

A more usual attitude to the British cinema is that of George Orwell, writing in 1941: 'The movies seem almost unaffected by the war, in technique and subject matter. They go on and on with the same treacly rubbish, and when they do touch on politics they are years behind the popular press and decades behind the average book.'

On the whole this attitude has been sustained by critics, among them some for whom scrutiny of the American cinema is a life work. Gainsborough, prisoner of war epics, Ealing comedy, Hammer horror, the Carry On cycle: the most prominent genres are seen as soft or escapist, the opposite of 'relevant', while even the celebrated real-life films of the early 60s tend to be closely based on 5 year old plays or novels. The result is that in Peter Wollen's words *(Signs and Meanings in the Cinema)* 'the English cinema... is still utterly amorphous, unclassified, unperceived'. Or was, until recently.

The Crazy Mirror (on Hollywood comedy) and now *A Mirror for England:* Raymond Durgnat's titles announce a vision like Tyler's (or Myra's). The cinema reflects national life and attitudes. Apparently no irrelevant film was made in Britain in the (roughly) two decades after 1945. 'A new contendedness with the *status quo* is registered by Ronald Neame's **The Card** (1952)' — page 32. **Whose** contentedness is not made clear: Neame's, Rank's, the regular Guinness-comedy audience, the nation's. They are implicitly merged. The film exists as evidence of a certain spirit in the air which it registers, or mirrors.

Where Durgnat differs from the Orwell-style dismissal is not in discovering ignored gems but in perceiving anew the main stream of British films. Writing them all off in the conventional way is short-sighted because (1) they **do** often reflect real developments and attitudes and (2) insofar as they don't, they are reflecting a spirit of nostalgia or escapism or evasion which in itself is equally 'real'. Looked at it this perspective, it is hardly possible for any film to be irrelevant. At his most parodiable Durgnat could, one feels, write up anything that one cared to film or write or do at any moment as significant for being either in tune with, or against, the spirit of the age. What his book most conspicuously lacks is a study or theory of how a mass medium actually operates, of what makes the cinema a potential 'mirror' for a society in a way that goes beyond journalism or the other arts. There is nothing with the coherence of Paul Mayersberg's explanation of the 'iconographical approach' to films on pages 78–9 of *Hollywood the Haunted House,* and little reference to variations in audience to the processes by which films are set up and shaped. **Upstairs and Downstairs** (Box/Thomas, 1959) is seen on the strength of its middle-class central couple with a servant problem as 'a celebration of dawning affluence', yet it can more convincingly be seen as a mindless, timeless relic of an unreal convention. What is it that makes this film, unsuccessful on any level, suggest itself as a more valid reflection of current society than, say, the 'Anyone for Tennis' category of West End light theatre, which no-one claims to 'mirror' anything except the preconceptions of a small class of play-goers? The distinction needs to be defined. The book is suspended betwee sociology and aesthetics, its method impressionistic. Yet this looseness is its strength: one certainly rates it above any sustained criticism yet written of the British cinema, and above the more academically disciplined work in the field of cinema sociology (though I may not be familiar with the right books in this last category).

*

'This work is meant to provoke discussion, not to terminate it' (Durgnat, p. 11). 'What I want is observations, not

agreement' (Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media)*. Both men's books commonly get received in irrelevant ways which ignore these sincere, and integral, hints.

Durgnat's books, more perhaps than those of other critics, suffer badly from the casual way film journalism operates in England. It is somewhat cynical of the *New Statesman* to entrust the reviewing not only of films, but of the occasional large pile of film books, to John Coleman. Yet the standards of the other weeklies, or of the main film magazines, are hardly better. I have been waiting for a long time to express gratitude to David Robinson as, I think, the sole regular film journalist who manages to take a 'serious' line without becoming merely smart and self-regarding.

It is easy, like the wren flying on the eagle's back, to detect mistakes in Durgnat and give the impression of superiority, as though one could have written the books better had one had the inclination. Durgnat must have a profounder and better-applied understanding than anyone of post-war British cinema. I offer criticisms in the spirit in which they are invited.

For one so long in gestation, the book is amazingly full of factual errors. There must be 40 misprints or mistakes in the filmography at the back, and as many in the text. Sybil Thorndike is not in **I Know Where I'm Going** (Nancy Price), nor Adam Faith in **Serious Charge** (Andrew Ray/Cliff Richard), nor is David Knight the hero of **Orders to Kill** (Paul Massie). Charles Crichton, not Frend, directed **Man in the Sky;** Willis Hall wrote **The Long and the Short and the Tall** before teaming up with Keith Waterhouse, and Wolf Mankowitz did the film adaptation; Michael Redgrave played Crocker-Harris, not Coker-, in **The Browning Version;** the book's second still shows Donald Sinden not Denholm Elliott; Antonioni made **Le Amiche,** not **Gli Amichi;** and so on. A list of this kind always seems pedantic, but the fact that the book is so alone in this field, and thus likely to be used for reference, make accuracy the more desirable.

Durgnat writes about so many films that one feels he should, like the Forth Bridge painters, ideally keep going back to his starting point to begin the operation afresh. Long passages are familiar from articles written five or more years ago. As soon as one sees a given film it is often easy to query the treatment it gets in the book, perhaps on the basis of a viewing ten years ago, and to feel that this is something other than simple difference of opinion. I can guarantee for instance that on re-seeing **A Boy a Girl and a Bike** (Ralph Smart, 1949) he would not write it off as abruptly as on page 123. It's not just that it is, within the canon of Ted Willis scripts, an arguably better film than the next decade's **It's Great to Be Young** and **No Trees in the Street,** both analysed in exhaustive detail; it is at least as interesting on any social or iconographical level, with its charismatic trio of Diana Dors, Anthony Newley, Honor Blackman, in a Northern location setting, confronting, and ultimately parting from, 'Pinewood Man' in the shape of John McCallum. To read the book is to make a series of such objections, or contributions.

The ambitious shape of the book creates an anomaly: so many hundreds of films cannot be held in the mind together. The reader cannot keep up with all the references, nor can he trust the author to still believe all he has written. Again, because the book will be a reference one (like Sarris's on the American Cinema), every one of its judgements matters. At the same time, its value is precisely that it covers so much ground, and at least states an attitude to so many unconsidered films and people.

To return to Peter Wollen's formula, Durgnat does, indeed, 'classify' as well as perceive: classifies by genre, theme, writer, director. There is an extraordinary ranking order of films at the back, and his estimate of directors is likely to be the most startling thing in the book. The division which he repeatedly, in effect, makes between content and form is a shock to anyone brought up to believe in their interconnexion. He seems able to switch off, at will, that sensitivity to style-as-meaning which he elsewhere (the Franju book; parts of *Films and Feelings;* sections of this book, *eg* on Powell and Losey) has admirably demonstrated.

The Robert Hamer film to which he devotes most space in **His Excellency** (1951). Any student of Hamer will probably agree it is his worst film: a straight, stagey adaptation of a West End success about colonial unrest, it flopped and is unrevived. Hamer remains embarrassingly 'outside' the drama. Yet because it is at script- (*ie* play-) level a film ostensibly sympathetic to the outgoing Labour government, it gains an important place in the tracing of certain political themes in British cinema. The point is that Durgnat makes no case for it as a film: one feels he might accept that it was both bad and unsuccessful. If its overt political commitment is so unrealised, and made so little impact, one questions its significance except as an instance of what the British cinema, or Ealing, or Hamer, was **not** at that point able to cope with. Yet in the book it is valued by its professed intentions: one wouldn't know that it worked less well than **Bonnie and Clyde.**

Most surprising of all is the detailed, respectful consideration given to such directors as Guest, Relph/Dearden, and the Boultings, and to such films as **The Browning Version** (Asquith), **80,000 Suspects** (Guest), **Sapphire** (R/D), **Heavens Above** and **Twisted Nerve** (the Boultings). These are all films I have seen since first looking at the book and each of them seem to me impossible to give the barest moral respect to, let alone serious aesthetic consideration. Durgnat could most of the time be working from a script, for all the account he takes of the films' form or texture: performances, casting, linking of sequences, layout of shots, etc. **Heavens Above,** the Boultings' church comedy, I personally regard as reaching a level in the cinema below which it would not be possible to go, and to support this view I have detailed notes with which I do not propose to pad out this book review. It is a genuinely worrying difference of approach (not just of opinion) and one is grateful to the author for provoking it so boldly. Most critics, I think, hated **Heavens Above,** yet it is a reasonably successful film in terms of public acceptance (Harold Wilson liked it): if, for all its demonstrable crudities, it has the degree of importance and influence Raymond Durgnat attributes to it, then our attempts (and his own, when he writes of Franju, Bresson and others) to discuss subtlety, style and organic unity are so much dilettantism. Not a novel issue to be raised, but a refreshingly direct one in the increasingly hermetic atmosphere of film-theory debate. It would be good to set up a showing of (say) **Heavens Above** sometime and argue the issues through. This is not the feeling one usually gets when disagreeing with a critic, but it is in the case of Durgnat.

The book should be read in sequence and not, at least until after the initial reading, used to dip into for reference. One can then avoid not being able to see the wood (argument, vision) for the trees (mistakes, irritations). The vision of a cinema which, for all the perhaps underestimated distortions and opacities, **has** been 'a mirror for England'. Rather than paraphrase or list the stimulating factors in the book, let me illustrate them with one phrase: 'Titfield Poujadism'. It is a superb, typical, formulation, of which no-one but Raymond Durgnat would have been capable. The exposure of the decadence of late T E B Clarke/Ealing comedy **(The Titfield Thunderbolt),** its linking with the 'small shopkeeper' ethos that keeps recurring in the British films of the time and with the political climate of Tory Coronation Year: these themes are convincingly traced and then memorably crystallised.

In an excellent 20th chapter, on the pretensions and limitations of British documentary, Lindsay Anderson and his associates on Free Cinema suffer. Yet Durgat is generous to Anderson's **This Sporting Life,** as he is harsh with some of the work of the Boultings and of Relph and Dearden. The final impression is that this indicates a saving openness, that he is sincere in professing to want to 'provoke discussion, not terminate it'. Could I provoke him into looking (again?) at certain films he ignores or disposes of very briefly, such as: **Double Confession, A Boy A Girl and a Bike, The Long Memory, White Corridors, No Place for Jennifer, The Birthday Present;** and at the work of that darkest of horses in the British Cinema, Vernon Sewell?

Charles Barr

Editor's Note. We apologize to readers for the late appearance of this issue. In addition, we regret very much that some copies of issue no 2 contained a wrong sequence of paragraphs on pp 21 and 24. In the review **The Spider's Strategy,** the penultimate sentence of the last paragraph but one should have concluded with the words 'that true creativity displays itself'. We obviously need a proof reader.

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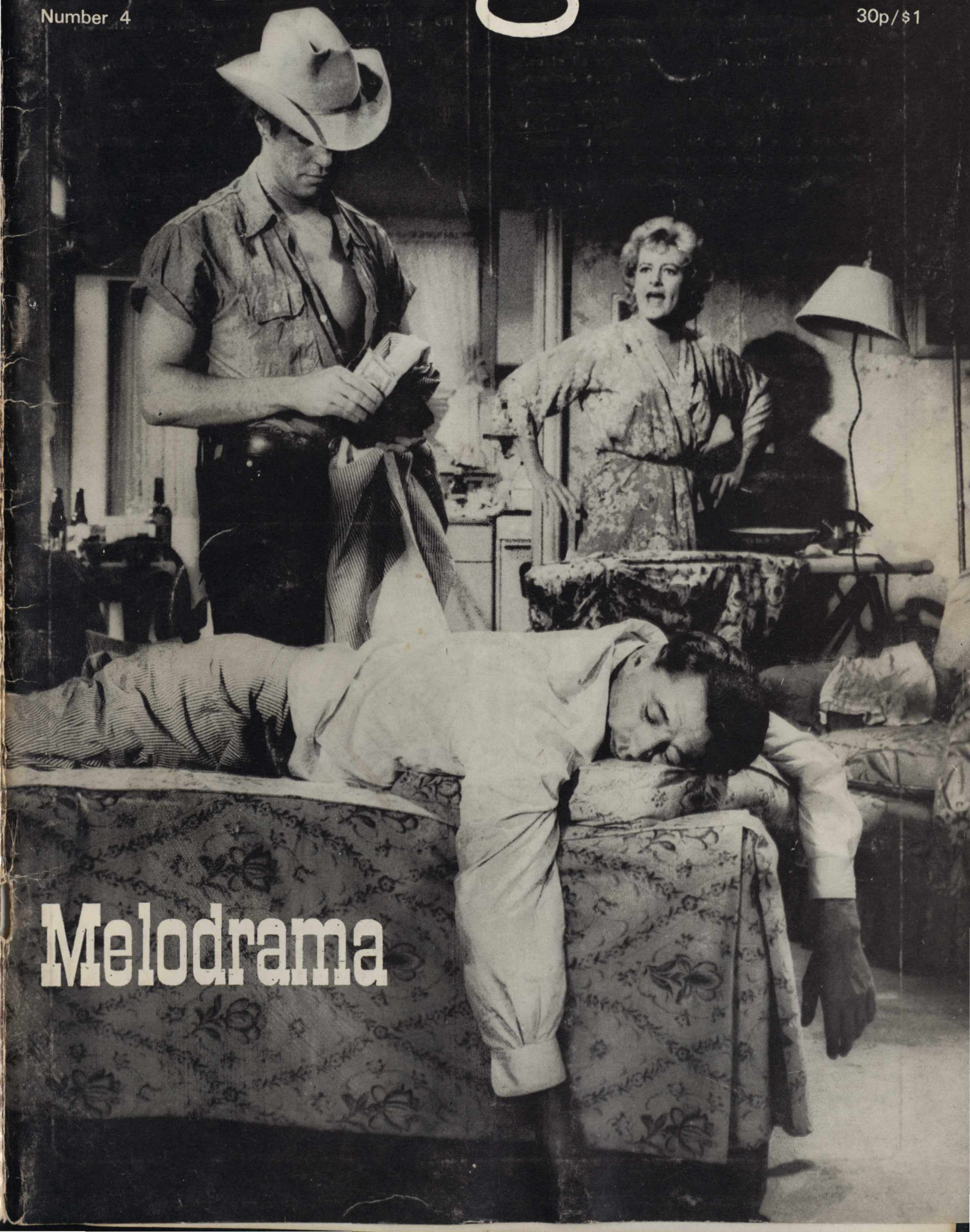

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Front Cover Robert Mitchum and George Peppard in Vincente Minnelli's *Home From the Hill*

Back Cover Fred McMurray and Barbara Stanwyck in Douglas Sirk's *There is Always Tomorrow*

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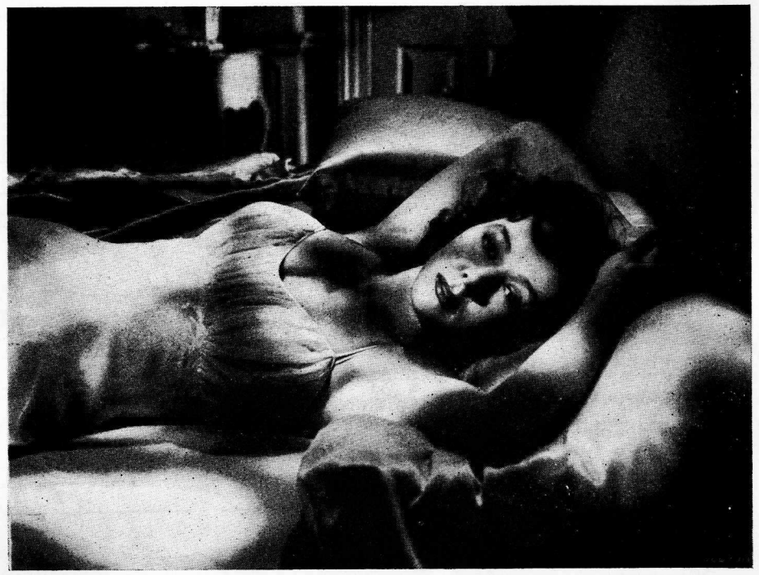
Tales of sound and fury

Observations on the Family Melodrama



Dappling the Dawn with Desire: Gloria Grahame in The Cobweb

Asked about the colour in *Written on the Wind,* Douglas Sirk recently replied: 'Almost throughout the picture I used deep-focus lenses which have the effect of giving a harshness to the objects and a kind of enamelled, hard surface to the colours. I wanted this to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters which is all inside them and can't break through.' It would be difficult to think of a better way of describing what this particular movie and indeed most of the best melodramas of the 'fifties and early 'sixties are about. Or for that matter, how closely, in a first-rate film, style and technique is related to theme.

*

My notes want to pursue an elusive subject in two directions: to indicate the development of what one might call the melodramatic imagination across different artistic forms and in different epochs; secondly, Sirk's remark tempts one to look for some structural and stylistic constants in one medium during one particular period (the Hollywood family melodrama between roughly 1940 and 1963) and to speculate on the cultural and psychological context which this form of melodrama so manifestly reflected and helped to articulate. Nonetheless this isn't a historical study in any strict sense, nor a *catalogue raisonné* of names and titles, for reasons that have something to do with my general method as well as with the obvious limitations imposed on film-research by the unavailability of most of the movies, and I am having to lean rather heavily on half a dozen films, and notably *Written on the Wind,* to develop my points. This said, it is difficult to see how references to twenty more movies would make the argument any truer. For better or worse, what I want to say should at this stage be taken to be provocative rather than proven.

how to make stones weep

Bearing in mind that (whatever one's scruples about an exact definition) everybody has some idea of what is meant by 'melodramatic', any discussion of the melodrama as a specific cinematic mode of expression has to start from its antecedents — the novel and certain types of 'entertainment' drama — from which script-writers and directors have borrowed their models.

The first thing one notices is that the media and literary forms which have habitually embodied melodramatic situations have changed considerably in the course of history, and, further, they differ from country to country: in England, it has mainly been the novel and the literary gothic where melodramatic motifs persistently crop up (though the Victorian stage, especially in the 1880s and '90s, knew an unprecedented vogue for the melodramas of R. Buchanan and G. R. Sims, plays in which 'a footbridge over a torrent breaks under the steps of the villain; a piece of wall comes down to shatter him; a boiler bursts, and blows him to smithereens');[1] in France, it is the costume drama and historical novel; in Germany 'high' drama and the ballad, as well as more popular forms like *Moritat* (street-songs); finally, in Italy the opera rather than the novel reached the highest degree of sophistication in the handling of melodramatic situations.

Two currents make up the genealogy. One leads from the late medieval morality play, the popular *gestes* and other forms of oral narrative and drama, like fairy-tales and folk-songs to their romantic revival and the cult of the picturesque in Scott, Byron, Heine and Victor Hugo, which has its low-brow echo in barrel-organ songs, music-hall drama, and what in Germany is known as *Bänkellied,* the latter coming to late literary honours through Brecht in his songs and musical plays, *The Threepenny Opera* or *Mahagonny*. The characteristic features for our present purposes in this tradition are not so much the emotional shock-tactics and the blatant playing on the audience's known sympathies and antipathies, but rather the non-psychological conception of the *dramatis personae*, who figure less as autonomous individuals than to transmit the action and link the various locales within a total constellation. In this respect, melodramas have a myth-making function, insofar as their significance lies in the structure and articulation of the action, not in any psychologically motivated correspondence with individualised experience.

Yet, what particularly marks the ballad or the *Bänkellied,* i.e. narratives accompanied by music, is that the moral/moralistic pattern which furnishes the primary content (crimes of passion bloodily revenged, murderers driven mad by guilt and drowning themselves, villains snatching children from their careless mothers, servants killing their unjust masters) is overlaid not only with a proliferation of 'realistic' homely detail, but also 'parodied' or relativised by the heavily repetitive verse-form or the mechanical up-and-down rhythms of the barrel organ, to which the voice of the singer adapts itself (consciously or not), thereby producing a vocal parallelism that has a distancing or ironic effect, to the extent of often criss-crossing the moral of the story by a 'false', i.e. unsyntactical emphasis. Sirk's most successful German melodrama, *Zu Neuen Ufern* makes excellent use of the street ballad to bring out the tragic irony in the court-room scene, and the tune which Walter Brennan keeps playing on the harmonica in King Vidor's *Ruby Gentry* works in a very similar way. A variation on this is the use of fairgrounds and carousels in films like *Some Came Running* and *Tarnished Angels,* or more self-consciously in Hitchcock (*Strangers on a Train, Stage Fright*) and Welles (*Lady from Shanghai* and *The Stranger*) to underscore the main action and at the same time 'ease' the melodramatic impact by providing an ironic parallelism. Sirk uses the motif repeatedly, cf also *Scandal in Paris* and *Take Me to Town.* What such devices point to is that in the melodrama the *rhythm* of experience often establishes itself against its value (moral, intellectual).

*

Perhaps the current that leads more directly to the sophisticated family melodrama of the '40's and '50's, though, is derived from the romantic drama which had its heyday after the French Revolution and subsequently furnished many of the plots for operas, but which is itself unthinkable without the C18th sentimental novel and the emphasis put on private feelings and interiorised (puritan, pietist) codes of morality and conscience. Historically, one of the interesting facts about this tradition is that its height of popularity seems to coincide (and this remains true throughout the C19th) with periods of intense social and ideological crisis. The pre-revolutionary sentimental novel — Richardson's *Clarissa* or Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloise,* for example — go out of their way to make a case for extreme forms of behaviour and feeling by depicting very explicitly certain external constraints and pressures bearing upon the characters, and by showing up the quasi-totalitarian violence perpetrated by (agents of) the 'system' (Lovelace who tries everything, from bribing her family to hiring pimps, prostitutes and kidnappers in order to get Clarissa to become his wife, only to have to rape her after all). The same pattern is to be found in the bourgeois tragedies of Lessing (*Emilia Galotti,* 1768) and the early Schiller (*Kabale und Liebe,* 1776), both deriving their dramatic force from the conflict between an extreme and highly individualised form of moral idealism in the heroes (again, non-psychological on the level of motivation) and a thoroughly corrupt yet seemingly omnipotent social class (made up of feudal princes and petty state functionaries). The melodramatic elements are clearly visible in the plots, which revolve around family relationships, star-crossed lovers and forced marriages. The villains (often of noble birth) demonstrate their superior political and economic power invariably by sexual aggression and attempted rape, leaving the heroine no other way than to commit suicide or take poison in the company of her lover. The ideological 'message' of these tragedies, as in the case of *Clarissa,* is transparent: they record the struggle of a morally and emotionally emancipated bourgeois consciousness against the remnants of feudalism. They pose the problem in political terms and concentrate on the complex interplay of ethical principles, religious-metaphysical polarities and the idealist aspirations typical of the bourgeoisie in its militant phase, as the protagonists come to grief in a maze of economic necessities, *realpolitik,* family loyalties, and through the abuse of aristocratic privilege from a still divinely ordained, and therefore doubly depraved absolutist authority.

Although these plays and novels, because they use the melodramatic-emotional plot only as their most rudimentary structure of meaning, belong to the more intellectually demanding forms of melodrama, the element of interiorisation and personalisation of what are primarily ideological conflicts, together with the metaphorical interpretation of class-conflict as sexual exploitation and rape is important in all subsequent forms of melodrama, including that of the cinema. (The latter in America, of course, is a stock theme of novels and movies with a 'Southern' setting.)

*

Paradoxically, the French Revolution failed to produce a new form of social drama or tragedy. The Restoration stage (when theatres in Paris were specially licensed to play 'melodramas') trivialised the form by using melodramatic plots in exotic settings, and providing escapist entertainment with little social relevance. The plays warmed up the standard motif of C18th French fiction and drama, that of innocence persecuted and virtue rewarded, and the conventions of melodrama functioned in their most barren form as the mechanics of pure suspense

Jane Wyman in All That Heaven Allows

— not unlike movies such as Fleischer's *Blind Terror* today mark the sad decline of the psychological thriller into total gratuity.

What before the Revolution had served to focus on suffering and victimisation — the claims of the individual in an absolutist society — was reduced to ground-glass-in-the-porridge, poisoned handkerchiefs and last-minute rescues from the dungeon. The sudden reversals of fortune, the intrusion of chance and coincidence had originally pointed to the arbitrary way feudal institutions could ruin the individual unprotected by civil rights and liberties. The system stood accused of greed, wilfulness and irrationality through the Christ-like suffering of the pure virgin and the selfless heroism of the right-minded in the midst of court-intrigues and callous

Carson, Stack, Malone, Hudson in The Tarnished Angels

indifference. Now, with the bourgeoisie triumphant, this form of drama lost its subversive charge and functioned more as a means of consolidating an as yet weak and incoherent ideological position. Whereas the pre-revolutionary melodramas had often ended tragically, those of the Restoration had happy endings, they reconciled the suffering individual to his social position, by affirming an 'open' society, where everything was possible. Over and over again, the victory of the 'good' citizen over 'evil' aristocrats, lecherous clergymen and the even more conventional villains drawn from the lumpen-proletariat, was re-enacted in sentimental spectacles full of tears and high moral tones. Complex social processes were simplified either by blaming the evil disposition of individuals or by manipulating the plots and engineering coincidences and other *dei ex machina,* such as the instant conversion of the villain, moved by the plight of his victim, or suddenly struck by Divine Grace on the steps of Nôtre-Dame.

Since the overtly 'conformist' strategy of such drama is quite evident, what is interesting is certainly not the plot-structure, but whether the conventions allowed the author to dramatize in his episodes actual contradictions in society and genuine clashes of interests in the characters. Already during the Revolution plays such as Monvel's *Les Victimes Cloîtrées* or Laya's *L'Ami des Lois,* though working with very stereotyped plots, conveyed quite definite political sympathies (the second, for instance, backed the Girondist moderates in the trial of Louis XVI against the Jacobites) and were understood as such by their public.[2]

Even if the form might act to reinforce attitudes of submission, the actual working out of the scenes could nonetheless present fundamental social evils. Many of the pieces also flattered popular sympathies by giving the villains the funniest lines, just as Victorian drama playing east of Drury Lane was often enlivened by low-comedy burlesque put on as curtain raisers and by the servants' farces during the intermission.

All this is to say that there seems a radical ambiguity attached to the melodrama, which holds even more for the film melodrama. Depending on whether the emphasis fell on the odyssey of suffering or the happy ending, and on where and in what context the rupture (moral conversion of the villain, unexpected appearance of a benevolent Capucine monk throwing off his pimp's disguise) occurred, that is to say, depending on what dramatic mileage was got out of the heroine's perils before the ending (and one only has to think of Sade's *Justine* to see what could be done with the theme of innocence unprotected . . .), melodrama would appear to function either subversively or as escapism — categories which are always relative to the given historical and social context.[3]

In the cinema, Griffith is a good example. Using identical dramatic devices and cinematic techniques, he could, with *Intolerance, Way Down East* or *Broken Blossoms* create, if not exactly subversive, at any rate enlightened and socially committed melodramas, whereas *Birth of A Nation* or *Orphans of the Storm* are classic examples of how melodramatic effects can successfully shift explicit political themes onto a personalised plane. In both cases, Griffith tailored ideological conflicts into emotionally loaded family situations.

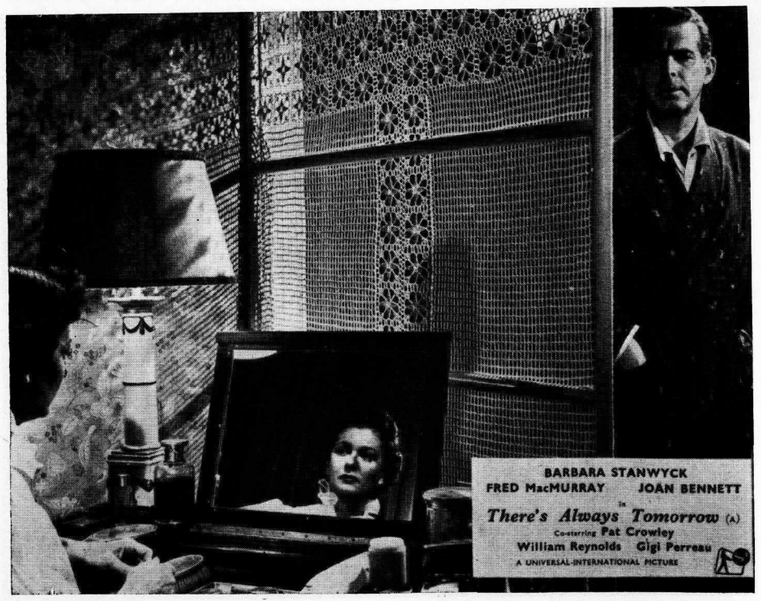
*

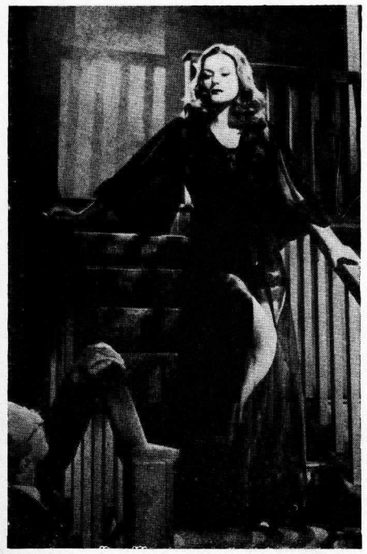
The persistence of the melodrama might indicate the ways in which popular culture has not only made note of social crises and the fact that the losers are not always those who deserve it most, but has also resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms. In this, there is obviously a healthy distrust of intellectualisation and abstract social theory — insisting that other structures of experience (those of suffering, for instance) are *more* in keeping with reality. But it has also meant a lamentable ignorance of the properly social and political dimensions of these changes and their causality, and consequently it has encouraged increasingly escapist forms of mass-entertainment.

However, this ambivalence about the 'structures' of experience, endemic in the melodramatic mode, has served artists throughout the C19th for the depiction of a variety of themes and social phenomena, while remaining within the popular idiom. Industrialisation, urbanisation and nascent entrepreneurial capitalism have found their most telling literary embodiment in a type of novel clearly indebted to the melodrama, and the national liberals in Italy during the *Risorgimento,* for example, apparently saw their political aspirations reflected in Verdi's operas (cf the opening of Visconti's *Senso*). In England, Dickens, Collins and Reade relied heavily on melodramatic plots to sharpen social conflicts and portray an urban environment where chance encounters, coincidences, and the side-by-side existence of extreme social and moral contrasts were the natural products of the very conditions of existence — crowded tenement houses, narrow streets backing on to the better residential property, and other facts of urban demography of the time. Dickens in particular uses the element of chance, the dream/waking, horror/bliss switches in *Oliver Twist* or *Tale of Two Cities* partly to feel his way towards a portrayal of existential insecurity and moral anguish which fiction had previously not encompassed, but also to explore depth-psychological phenomena, for which the melodrama — as Freud was later to confirm — has supplied the dynamic motifs and the emotional-pictorial decor. What seems to me important in this form of melodrama (and one comes across a similar conception in the sophisticated Hollywood melodramas) is the emphasis Dickens places on discontinuity, on the evidence of fissures and ruptures in the fabric of experience, and the appeal to a reality of the psyche — to which the notions of sudden change, reversal and excess lend a symbolic plausibility.

*

In France it is the works of Sue, Hugo and Balzac that reflect most closely the relation of melodrama to social upheaval. Sue, for example, uses the time-worn trap-door devices of cloak and dagger stage melodrama for an explicitly sensationalist, yet committed journalism. In a popular form and rendered politically palatable by the fictionalised treatment, his *Mystères de Paris* were intended to crusade on such issues as public health, prostitution, overcrowding and slum housing, sanitation, black-market racketeering, corruption in government circles, opium smoking and gambling. Sue exploited a 'reactionary' form for reformist ends, and





Hazel Brooks in Sirk's Sleep My Love

his success, both literary and practical, proved him right. Twenty years later Victor Hugo, who had learnt as much from Sue as Sue had picked up from *Nôtre-Dame de Paris*, produced with *Les Misérables* a super-melodrama spectacular which must stand as the crowning achievement of the genre in the novel. The career of Jean Valjean, from convict and galley slave to factory owner and capitalist, his fall and literal emergence from the sewers of Paris to become a somewhat unwilling activist in the '48 Revolution, is staged with the help of mistaken identities, orphans suddenly discovering their noble birth, inconvenient reappearance of people long thought dead, hair-breadth escapes and rescues, multiple disguises, long-suffering females dying of consumption or wandering for days through the streets in search of their child — and yet, through all this Hugo expresses a hallucinating vision of the anxiety, the moral confusion, the emotional demands, in short, the metaphysics of social change and urban life between the time of Waterloo and 1848. Hugo evidently wanted to bring together in a popular form subjective experiences of crises, while keeping track of the grand lines of France's history, and he succeeds singularly well in reproducing the ways individuals with different social backgrounds, levels of awareness and imaginations, respond to objective changes in the social fabric of their lives. For this, the melodrama, with its shifts in mood, its different *tempi* and the mixing of stylistic levels, is ideally suited. *Les Misérables,* even more so than the novels of Dickens, lets through a symbolic dimension of psychic truth, with the hero in turn representing very nearly the id, the super-ego and finally the sacrificed ego of a repressed and paranoid society.

Balzac on the other hand, uses melodramatic plots to a rather different end. Many of his novels deal with the dynamics of early capitalist economics. The good/evil dichotomy has almost disappeared, and the manichean conflicts have shifted away from questions of morality to the paradoxes of psychology and economics. What we see is a Schopenhauerian struggle of the will, and the ruthlessness of the industrial entrepreneurs and bankers, the spectacle of an uprooted, 'decadent' aristocracy still holding tremendous political power, the sudden twists of fortune with no-good parasites becoming millionaires overnight (or vice versa) through speculation and the stock-exchange, the antics of hangers-on, parvenus and cynical artist-intellectuals, the demonic, spell-binding potency of money and capital, the contrasts between abysmal poverty and unheard-of affluence and waste which characterised the 'anarchic' phase of industrialisation and high finance, were among other things experienced by Balzac as both vital and melodramatic. His work reflects this more in plot and style than through direct comment.

*

To sum up: these writers all understood the melodrama as a form which carried its own values and already embodied its own significant content: it served as the literary equivalent of a particular, historically and socially conditioned *mode of experience.* Even if the situations and sentiments defied all categories of verisimilitude and were totally unlike anything in real life, the structure had a truth and a life of its own, which an artist could make part of his material. This meant that those who consciously adopted melodramatic techniques of presentation did not necessarily do so out of incompetence nor always from a cynical distance, but, by turning a body of techniques into a psychological principle that carried the distinct overtones of spiritual crisis, they could put their finger on the texture of their social and human material while still being free to shape this material any way they chose. For there is little doubt that the whole conception of life in 19th century Europe and England, and especially the spiritual problems of the age, were often viewed in categories we would today call melodramatic -- one can see this in painting, architecture, the ornamentation of gadgets and furniture, the domestic and public mise-en-scène of events and occasions, the oratory in parliament, the tractarian rhetoric from the pulpit as well as the more private manifestations of religious sentiment. Similarly, the timeless themes that Dostoyevsky brings up again and again in his novels — guilt, redemption, justice, innocence, freedom — are made specific and historically real not least because he was a great writer of melodramatic scenes and confrontations, and they more than anything else define that powerful irrational logic in the motivation and moral outlook of, say, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamasov or Kirilov. Finally, how different Kafka's novels would be, if they did not contain those melodramatic family situations, pushed to the point where they reveal a dimension at once comic and tragically absurd — perhaps the existential undertow of all genuine melodrama.

putting melos into drama

In its dictionary sense, melodrama is a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects. This is still perhaps the most useful definition, because it allows melodramatic elements to be seen as constituents of a system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the story-line, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue. The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation.

*

Music in melodrama, for example, as a device among others to dramatize a given narrative, is subjective, programmatic, 'debussyist'. But because it is also a form of punctuation in the above sense, it is both functional (ie of structural significance) and thematic (ie belonging to the expressive content) because used to formulate certain moods — sorrow, violence, dread, suspense, happiness. The syntactic function of music has, as is well-known, survived into the sound film, and the experiments conducted by Hanns Eisler and T. W. Adorno are highly instructive in this respect.[4] A more practical demonstration of the problem can be got from the almost farcical account which Lilian Ross gives of how Gottfried Reinhard and his composer chopped about John Huston's *Red Badge of Courage* to give it a smooth dramatic shape, with build-ups and climaxes all in the proper order, which is exactly what Huston wanted to avoid when he shot it.[5]

*

That the status of *parole* and syntax of music or natural sound in the cinematic discourse can be used for non-melodramatic ends is proven by the European silent cinema (though I would exclude Eisenstein whose use of music tends to be melodramatic) — the techniques of Sjöstrom and Dreyer have led, via Bresson, to Godard, Straub and others who have systematically explored a possible sound/image dialectic. To what extent, however, their films can still be called dramatic is another question.

The same ambiguity, of being both part of the form and the content, applies to another system of primitive melodramatic punctuation (often not recognised as such), namely the moral black-and-white depiction of the characters — villain, hero, innocence unprotected, false friend, despotic father. Only if one insists on looking for psychologically motivated individuals as one's chief aesthetic criterion do they seem irritatingly simplistic. Much of world-literature, from Homer and Boccaccio to Rabelais and Molière, is simplistic in this way. But what we reject as crude moralism may not be exclusively thematic and will appear more revealing if treated in terms of structural oppositions and rhythmic variations. Already in Griffith and Stroheim the simple dualisms of moral contrasts are often subtly undermined by structural parallels. For ex-

ample, the cat-bird metaphors in *Greed* appear quite complex in the way they criss-cross the Trina-McTeague polarity, and there is a shot of Trina squeezing inadvertently her kitchen sponge and then quickly mopping up the water, when she hears of McTeague having lost his dentist's licence, which serves as a dialectical metaphor of her personality: impulsive underneath her meekness, hypocritical in her greed. Having squeezed McTeague dry, she wants to keep everything for herself.

*

Such techniques can perhaps be generalised: If hero and villain, for instance, are seen doing trivial acts in a similar way (wash their hands, or eat a fried egg) the apparently non-significant (visual) parallel will help to modify the apparently all-important (moral) contrast. A parallelism on the level of overt intrigue or suspense (a repeated piece of action at a dramatically emphatic point — hero and villain both slamming the door, or passing the same street corner in hot pursuit of the heroine) will on the other hand tend to reinforce the moral contrast. Griffith uses his cross-cutting in both these ways.

This illustrates a principle one might call cinematic counterpoint: in the latter example, stylistic means, ie the lower register of punctuation (parallel montage, cross-cutting, visual repetition, musical accompaniment) serves to intensify the melodic line of the upper register (the story, the intrigue); in the former case, the same techniques are used to construct a different line 'against the current', which if developed consistently, can constitute itself as a theme in its own right.

The difference is one of stylistics, of emphasis or 'soft-pedalling' in the telling of the tale. It is one of the ways American films have always been able to 'contradict' or subvert their manifest moral intent or ideological bias. This is particularly important when one discusses the melodrama with a happy ending, because the stylistic countercurrent is often so strong that it makes the story and its resolution bristle with a kind of built-in resistance to its own facile optimism — if one cares to look closely.

*

Because it had to rely on piano accompaniment for punctuation, all silent film drama — from *True Heart Susie,* to *Foolish Wives* or *The Lodger* — is 'melodramatic'. It meant that directors had to develop an extremely subtle and yet precise formal language (of lighting, staging decor, acting, close-up, montage and camera movement), because they were deliberately looking for ways to compensate for the expressiveness, range of inflection and tonality, rhythmic emphasis and tension normally present in the spoken word. Having had to replace that part of language which is sound pattern capable of almost unlimited modulation by pictorial and dynamic values inherent in the medium, directors like Murnau, Renoir, Hitchcock, Mizoguchi, Hawks, Lang, Sternberg achieved in their films a high degree (well recognised at the time) of plasticity in the modulation of optical planes and spatial masses which Panofsky rightly identified as a 'dynamisation of space'.

Among less gifted directors this sensitivity in the deployment of expressive means was partly lost with the advent of direct sound, since it seemed no longer necessary in a strictly technical sense — pictures 'worked' on audiences through their dialogue, and the semantic force of language (once more united into *langue* and *parole*) drowned out and overshadowed the more sophisticated pictorial effects and architectural values. This perhaps helps to explain the decline of the melodrama in favour of action pictures and comedies (with the notable exception of Borzage), and also why some major technical innovations, such as colour, wide-angle and deep-focus lenses, crane and dolly, have in fact encouraged a new form of sophisticated melodrama, with directors (quite a sizeable proportion of whom were imported during the '30s from Germany, and others were clearly indebted to German expressionism and Max Reinhardt's methods of theatrical mise-en-scène) showing a similar degree of visual culture as the masters of silent film-drama: Ophüls, Lubitsch, Sirk, Preminger, Welles, Losey, Ray, Minnelli, Cukor.

*

Considered as an expressive code, melodrama might therefore be described as a particular form of dramatic mise-en-scène, characterised by a dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual or literary ones. Dramatic situations are given an orchestration which will allow for complex aesthetic patterns: indeed, orchestration is fundamental to the American cinema as a whole (being essentially a dramatic cinema, spectacular, and based on a broad appeal) because it has drawn the aesthetic consequences of having the spoken word more as an additional 'melodic' dimension than as an autonomous semantic discourse. Sound, whether musical or verbal acts first of all to give the illusion of depth to the moving image, and by helping to create the third dimension of the spectacle, dialogue becomes a scenic element, along with more directly visual means of the mise-en-scène. Anyone who has ever had the bad luck of watching a Hollywood movie dubbed into French or German will know how important diction is to the emotional resonance and dramatic continuity. Dubbing makes the best picture seem visually flat and dramatically out of sync: it destroys the flow on which the coherence of the illusionist spectacle is built.

*

That the plasticity of the human voice is quite consciously employed by directors for what are often thematic ends is known: Hawks trained Lauren Bacall's voice so that she could be given 'male' lines in *To Have and Have Not*, an effect which Sternberg anticipated when he took great care to cultivate Marlene Dietrich's diction, and it is hard to miss the psychoanalytic significance of Robert Stack's voice in *Written on the Wind*, sounding as if every word had to be painfully pumped up from the bottom of one of his oil-wells.

If it is true that *langue* in the American cinema loses some of its semantic importance (it rarely transmits 'ideas') in favour of its aspects as sound, then conversely, lighting, montage, decor, etc (in other contexts the more decorative elements) increase their semantic and syntactic contribution to the aesthetic effect. They become part of the content and the structure, ie integral elements of meaning. This, of course, is the justification for giving primary importance to the mis-en-scène over intellectual content or story-value. It is also the reason why the domestic melodrama in colour and widescreen, as it appeared in the '40's and '50s, is at its best perhaps the most highly elaborated, complex mode of cinematic signification that the American cinema has ever produced, because of the restricted scope for external action determined by the subject, and because everything, as Sirk said, happens 'inside'. To the 'sublimation' of the action picture and the Busby Berkeley/Lloyd Bacon musical into domestic and family melodrama there corresponded a sublimation of dramatic values into decor, colour, gesture and composition of frame, which in the best melodramas is perfectly thematised in terms of the characters' emotional and psychological predicaments.

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For example, when in ordinary language we call something melodramatic, what we often mean is an exaggerated rise-and-fall pattern in human actions and emotional responses, a from-the-sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement, a foreshortening of lived time in favour of intensity — all of which produces a graph of much greater fluctuation, a quicker swing from one extreme to the other than is considered natural, realistic or in conformity with literary standards of verisimilitude: in the novel we like to sip our pleasures, rather than gulp them. But if we look at, say, Minnelli, who has adapted some of his best melodramas (*The Cobweb, Some Came Running, Home From the Hill, Two Weeks in Another Town, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*) from generally extremely long, circumstantially detailed popular novels (by James Jones, Irving Shaw *et al*), it is easy to see how in the process of having to reduce 7 to 9 hours' reading matter to 90-odd minutes, such a more violent 'melodramatic' graph almost inevitably produces itself, short of the whole thing becoming incoherent. Whereas in novels, especially when they are staple pulp fare, the stuffing has a distinct aesthetic and emotional value, the specific values of the cinema (as in poetry and drama) lie in its concentrated visual metaphors and dramatic acceleration rather than in the fictional techniques of dilation. The commercial necessity of compression (being also a formal one) is taken by Minnelli into the films themselves and developed as a theme — that of a pervasive psychological pressure on the characters, an acute sense of claustrophobia in decor and locale, or again, it translates itself into a restless, and yet suppressed energy surfacing sporadically in the actions and the behaviour of the protagonists — which is already part of the subject of a film like *Two Weeks in Another Town,* with hysteria bubbling all the time just below the surface. Also, the feeling that there is always more to tell than can be said leads him to employ a very consciously elliptical narrative, proceeding often by visually condensing the characters' motivation into non-essential (non-diegetic) sequences of images, a method for which the equivalent in poetry or modern fiction would be the metaphor or metonymy. The shot of the Trevi fountain at the end of a complex scene where Kirk Douglas is making up his mind in *Two Weeks* is such a metonymy, and so is the silent sequence, consisting entirely of what might appear to be merely impressionistic dissolves, in the *Four Horsemen,* when Glenn Ford and Ingrid Thulin go for a ride to Versailles, but which in fact tells and foretells the whole trajectory of their relationship.

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Sirk, too, often constructs his films in this way: the restlessness of *Written on the Wind* is not unconnected with the fact that he almost always cuts to movement, and his metonymies really ought to have a chapter to themselves: a yellow sports-car drawing up the gravelled driveway to stop in front of a pair of shining white doric columns outside the Hadley mansion is not only a powerful piece of American iconography, especially when taken in a plunging high-angle shot, but the contrary associations of imperial splendour and vulgar materials (polished chrome-plate and stucco plaster) create a tension of correspondences and dissimilarities in the same image, which perfectly crystallizes the decadent affluence and melancholy energy that give the film its uncanny fascination. Sirk has a peculiarly vivid eye for the contrasting emotional qualities of textures and materials, and he combines them to very striking effect, especially when they occur in a non-diegetic sequence: again in *Written on the Wind*, after the funeral of Hadley Sr., a very black negro servant is seen taking an oleander wreath off the front gate. A black silk ribbon gets unstuck and is blown by the wind along the concrete path. The camera follows the movement, dissolves and dollies in on a window, where Lauren Bacall, in an oleander-green dress is just about to disappear behind the courtains. The scene has no plot significance whatsoever. But the colour parallels black/black, green/green, white concrete/white lace curtains provide an extremely strong emotional resonance in which the contrast of soft silk blown along the hard concrete is registered the more forcefully as a disquieting visual association. The desolation of the scene transfers itself onto the Bacall character, and the traditional fatalistic association of the wind remind us of the futility implied in the movie's title.

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These effects, of course, require a highly self-conscious artist, but they are by no means as rare as the myths about Hollywood lead one to believe. The fact that commercial necessities, political censorship and the various morality codes have restricted directors in what they could tackle as a subject has entailed a different awareness of what constitutes a worthwhile subject, a change in orientation from which sophisticated melodrama benefited perhaps most. Not only did they provide a defined thematic perimeter, but they encouraged a conscious use of form-as-content, which is a mark of what I would consider to be the very

Fate Casts the Shadows: Lana Turner and Kirk Douglas in The Bad and the Beautiful *(left), Robert Mitchum, Katherine Hepburn and Robert Taylor in* Undercurrent

Susan Kohner, Sandra Dee in Imitation of Life

condition of modern art. To take another example from Minnelli: his recurrent theme of a character trying to construct the world in the image of his inner self, only to discover that this world has become uninhabitable because it is both frighteningly suffocating and intolerably lonely (*The Long, Long Trailer, The Cobweb*) is a transformed and intellectually deepened version of the stock melodrama theme of the woman who, having failed to make it in the big city, comes back to the small-town home in the hope of finding her true place at last, but who is made miserable by mean-mindedness and bigotry and then suffocated by the sheer weight of her none-too-glorious, still-raw-in-the-memory past (*Hilda Crane, Beyond the Forest, All I Desire*).[6] But in Minnelli, it becomes an opportunity to explore in concrete circumstances the more philosophical questions of freedom and determinism, especially as they touch the aesthetic problem of how to depict a character who is not constantly externalising himself into action, without thereby trapping him in an environment of ready-made symbolism.

Similarly, when Robert Stack shows Lauren Bacall her hotel suite in *Written on the Wind*, where everything from flowers and pictures on the wall to underwear, nailpolish and handbag is provided, Sirk is not only concerned with the theme of a rich man wanting to take over the woman he fancies body and soul, or the oppressive nature of an unwanted gift but he is also making a direct comment on the Hollywood stylistic technique that 'creates' a character out of the elements of the decor, and that prefers actors who can provide as blank a facial surface and as little of a personality as possible — which is in itself perhaps the sign of a society whose moral and emotional values have undergone a systematic process of reification.

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Everyone who has at all thought about the Hollywood aesthetic wants to formulate one of its peculiar qualities: that of direct emotional arousal, whether one calls it 'giving resonance to dramatic situations' or 'fleshing out the cliché' or whether, more abstractly, one talks in terms of identification patterns, empathy and catharsis. Since the American cinema, determined as it is by an ideology of the spectacle and the spectacular, is essentially dramatic (as opposed to lyrical, ie concerned with mood or the inner self) and not conceptual (dealing with ideas and the structures of cognition and perception), the creation or re-enactment of situations which the spectator can identify with and recognise (whether this recognition is on the conscious or subconscious level is another matter) depends to a large extend on the aptness of the iconography (the 'visualisation') and on the quality (complexity, subtlety, ambiguity) of the orchestration for what are trans-individual, popular mythological (and therefore generally considered culturally 'lowbrow') experiences and plot-structures. In other words, the aesthetic qualities of this type of cinema depend on the ways 'melos' is given to 'drama' by means of lighting, montage, visual rhythm, decor, style of acting, music — that is, on the ways the mise-en-scène translates character into action (not unlike the pre-Jamesean novel) and action into gesture and dynamic space (comparable to C19th opera and ballet). There is no prime on 'originality' and 'uniqueness' in the literary sense, which is why Parker Tyler's occasional twinges of high-brow conscience (not to mention Pauline Kael's schizophrenia on the subject) are not only unnecessary but fundamentally misplaced.

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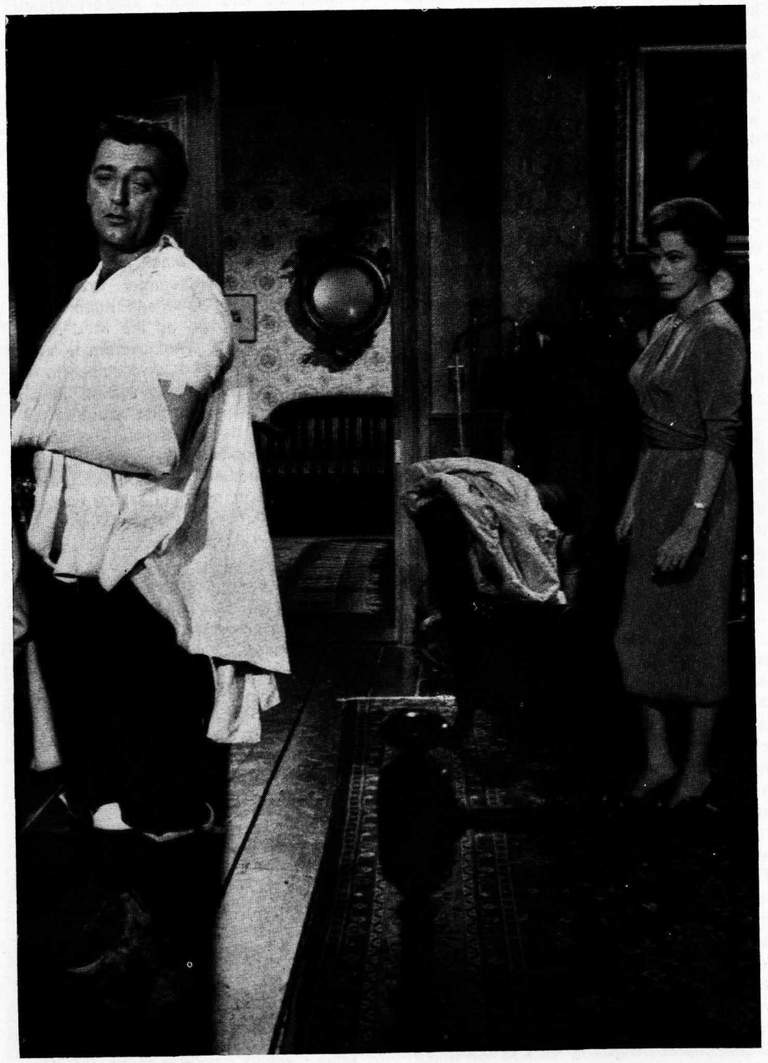
Directors with a flair for 'drama' in the more conventionally theatrical sense, but with not much in the way of mise-en-scène. such as Mankiewicz, Curtiz, Lumet and Zinnemann are for this reason on the periphery of the Hollywood style (and have had a correspondingly low rating among serious students of the American cinema), because they appear more European, in the sense that they want to appeal primarily to a culturally literate and literary public, whose idea of aesthetic enjoyment in the cinema is compounded by the canons of good taste and civilised entertainment. This middle-class view of the cinema is on the whole hostile to the melodrama and bothered by its mechanisms of emotional solicitation. Films like *Casablanca, The Barefoot Contessa* or *High Noon* have a certain degree of (mildly) intellectual sophistication, but nothing in terms of visual elaboration to compensate for their verbal explicitness, or on the emotional side to make up for their literalness of story and symbolism. From this point of view, they compare unfavourably to their more low-brow, a-moral (though by no means un-intellectual or vulgar) counterparts, such as *The Maltese Falcon*, *To Have and Have Not, The Bad and the Beautiful* or *Rio Bravo*.

Leaving aside that preference for the latter movies (or indeed for the qualities of mise-en-scène as a whole) may simply be due to a long-standing and possibly outdated habit, the difference is nevertheless relevant to the argument, insofar as any definition of the American melodrama in

Robert Mitchum, Eleanor Parker in Home From the Hill



a descriptive sense ought to account for the techniques by which directors make conspicuous use of the cinema's potential to arouse strong emotional-aesthetic responses and structure them in complex patterns, a potential which the former films leave unexplored.

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Not all of the American cinema, however, works with the same full-out emotional involvement I have been suggesting, and not all of it the same way. To begin with, the question of how emotional responses are triggered off and of what kind they are is difficult to assess and may well differ from one person to the next. Secondly, since any identification must to some extent depend on recognition, we still have to distinguish between whether we recognise what the images refer to as something that might happen/has happened within the purview of our own experiences, or whether we recognise it as forming part of our cinematic experience, ie that it reminds us of other movies. No doubt, Westerns work very strongly on recognition responses of the second kind, and there may well be a case for arguing that all our responses only start to become useful for aesthetic analysis when we can distinguish the second-degree responses — what we know about the cinema — from responses to what we know about life.

This granted, there seems to be a further problem which has some bearing on the question of melodrama: although the techniques of audience-orientation and the possibility of psychic projection on the part of the spectator are as much in evidence in a melodrama like *Home From the Hill* or *Splendour in the Grass* as they are in a Western or adventure picture, the difference of setting and milieu is nevertheless strongly reflected in the structure of the dynamic action. In the Western especially, the assumption of an 'open' world is virtually axiomatic; it is indeed one of the constants which makes the form perennially attractive to a largely urban audience, and this openness shows even in films that deal with potential 'melodrama' themes and family situations. The complex father-son relationships in *The Left-Handed Gun,* the Cain-Abel themes of Mann's Westerns (*Winchester 73, Bend of the River*), the conflict of virility and mother-fixation in some of Tourneur's Westerns (*Great Day in the Morning, Wichita*) or the search for the mother(-country) in Fuller's *Run of the Arrow* are all clarified because the hero can act positively, as a morally free agent, on the changing situations where and when they present themselves. Even in the Walsh adventure pictures, as Peter Lloyd has shown,[7] identity comes in an often paradoxical process of self-confirmation and overreaching — but always through direct action, while the momentum generated by the conflicts pushes the protagonists forward in an unrelentingly linear course.

The family melodrama, by contrast, though dealing largely with the same oedipal themes of emotional and moral identity, more often records the failure of the protagonist to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the stifling social milieu. The world is closed, and the characters are acted upon. Melodrama confers on them a negative identity through suffering, and the progressive self-immolation and disillusionment generally ends in resignation: they emerge as lesser human beings for having become wise and acquiescent to the ways of the world.

The difference can be put in another way. In one case, the drama moves towards its resolution by having the central conflicts successively externalised and projected into direct action. A jail-break, a bank-robbery, a Western chase or cavalry charge, and even a criminal investigation (apart from creating a distinctive drive pattern) all lend themselves to psychologised, thematised representations of the heroes' inner dilemmas and frequently appear that way (Walsh's *White Heat* or *They Died With their Boots On,* Losey's *The Criminal*, Preminger's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*). The same is true of the melodrama in the *série noire* tradition, where the hero is edged on or blackmailed by the *femme fatale* — the smell of honeysuckle and death in *Double Indemnity, Out of the Past* or *Detour* — into a course of action which pushes him further and further in one direction, opening a narrowing wedge of equally ineluctible consequences, that usually lead the hero to wishing his own death as the ultimate act of liberation, but where the mechanism of fate at least allows him to express his existential revolt in strong and strongly anti-social behaviour.

Rock Hudson in Written on the Wind ...

... *and in* The Tarnished Angels

Not so in the domestic melodrama: the social pressures are such, the frame of respectability so sharply defined that the range of 'strong' actions is limited. The tellingly impotent gesture, the social gaffe, the hysterical outburst replaces any more directly liberating or self-annihilating action, and the cathartic violence of a shoot-out or a chase becomes an inner violence, often one which the characters turn against themselves. The dramatic configuration, the pattern of the plot makes them, regardless of attempts to break free, constantly look inwards, at each other and themselves. The characters are, so to speak, each others' sole referent, there is no world outside to be acted on, no reality that could be defined or assumed unambiguously. In Sirk, of course, they are locked into a universe of real and metaphoric mirrors, but quite generally, what is typical of this form of melodrama is that the characters' behaviour is often pathetically at variance with the real objectives they want to achieve. A sequence of substitute actions creates a kind of vicious circle in which the close nexus of cause and effect is somehow broken and — in an often overtly Freudian sense — displaced. James Dean in *East of Eden* thinks up a method of cold storage for lettuce, grows beans to sell to the Army, falls in love with Julie Harris, not to make a pile of money and live happily with a beautiful wife, but in order to win the love of his father and oust his brother — neither of which he achieves. Although very much on the thematic surface of Kazan's film (with the characters actually called — if I remember rightly — Cain and Abel), this is a conjunction of puritan capitalist ethic and psychoanalysis which is sufficiently pertinent to the American melodrama to remain exemplary.

The better melodramas, however — those of Ray, Sirk or Minnelli — do not deal with this displacement-by-substitution directly, but by what one might call an intensified symbolisation of everyday actions, the heightening of the ordinary gesture and a use of setting and decor so as to reflect the characters' fetishist fixations. Violent feelings are given vent on 'overdetermined' objects (James Dean kicking his father's portrait as he storms out of the house in *Rebel Without A Cause*), and aggressiveness is worked out by proxy. In such films, the plots have a quite noticeable propensity to form a circular pattern, which in Ray involves an almost geometrical variation of triangle into circle and vice versa,[8] whereas Sirk (*nomen est omen*) often suggests in his circles the possibility of a tangent detaching itself — the full-circle construction of *Written on the Wind* with its linear coda of the Hudson-Bacall relationship at the end, or even more visually apparent, the circular race around the pylons in *Tarnished Angels* broken when Dorothy Malone's plane can in the last image soar past the fatal pylon into an unlimited sky.

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It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the structural changes from linear externalisation of action to a sublimation of dramatic values into more complex forms of symbolisation, and which I take to be a central characteristic of the melodramatic tradition in the American cinema, can be followed through on a more general level where it reflects a change in the history of dramatic forms and the articulation of energy in the American cinema as a whole.

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As I have tried to show in an earlier article (*Monogram* No 1), one of the typical features of the classical Hollywood movie has been that the hero was defined dynamically, as the centre of a continuous movement, often both from sequence to sequence as well as within the individual shot. It is an optical fact that in order to get its bearing, the eye adjusts almost automatically to whatever moves, and movement, together with sound, completes the realistic illusion, taking the cinematic image out of the limbo of shadow reflections to which earlier film-aesthetics had tried to confine it. Now, it was on the basis of sheer physical movement, for example, that the musicals of the '30s (Lloyd Bacon's *42nd Street* being perhaps the most spectacular example), the gangster movie and the B-thriller of the 40s and early '50s could subsist with the flimsiest of plots, an almost total absense of individual characterisation and rarely any big stars. These deficiencies were made up by focusing to the point of exaggeration on the drive, the obsession, the *idée fixe,* that is to say, by a concentration on the purely kinetic-mechanical elements of human motivation. The pattern is most evident in the gangster genre, where the single-minded pursuit of money and power is followed by the equally single-minded and peremptory pursuit of physical survival,

Women Waiting ... Colbert, Jones, Temple in Cromwell's Since You Went Away

ending in the hero's apotheosis through violent death. This curve of rise and fall — a wholly stylised and external pattern which takes on a moral, exemplary significance — can be seen in movies like *Underworld, Little Caesar, The Roaring Twenties, Legs Diamond* and depends at the lowest lovel on the verve and stamina of the narrative pace, though at a somewhat higher level it permits interesting variations and complexities, as in Fuller's *Underworld USA.* The more sophisticated directors, such as Hawks, have used speed of delivery and the pulsating urgency of action to comic effect (*Scarface, 20th Century*) and have even applied it to films whose dramatic structure did not naturally demand such a treatment (notably *His Girl Friday*). In fact Hawks' reputed stoicism, if looked at carefully, is little more than a dramaturgical device, whereby sentimentality and cynicism are played so close together and played so fast that the result is an emotional hot-cold shower which is apt to numb the spectator's sensibility into feeling a sustained moral charge, where there is more often simply a very skilled switchboard manipulation of the same basic voltage. (I am thinking especially of films like *Only Angels Have Wings*).

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This unrelenting internal combustion engine of physical and psychic energy, generically exemplified by the hard-boiled, crackling aggressiveness of the screwball comedy, but which Walsh diagnosed in his Cagney heroes as psychotic dynamite (*White Heat*) and a vehicle for extreme redneck republicanism (*A Lion in the Streets*), shows signs of a definite slowing-down in the '50s and early '60s, where raucous vitality and instinctual 'lust for life' is deepened psychologically to intimate neuroses and adolescent or not so adolescent maladjustments of a wider social significance, and where individual initiative is perceived as problematic in explicitly political terms (*All the King's Men*), after having previously been merely stoically and heroically anti-social, as in the *film noire.* The external world is more and more riddled with obstacles which oppose themselves to personal ambition and are not simply overcome by the hero's assertion of a brawny or brainy libido. In Mann's Westerns the madness at the heart of the James Stewart character only occasionally breaks through an otherwise calm and controlled surface, like a strong subterranean current suddenly appearing above ground as an inhuman and yet somehow poetically apt thirst for vengeance and primitive Biblical justice, where the will to survive is linked to certain old-fashioned cultural and moral values — of dignity, honour and respect. And we have it in the films of Sirk, where an uncompromising, fundamentally innocent energy is gradually turned away from simple, direct fulfilment by the emergence of a conscience, a sense of guilt and responsibility, or the awareness of moral complexity, as in *Magnificent Obsession, Sign of the Pagan, All that Heaven Allows* and even *Interlude* — a theme which in Sirk is always interpreted in terms of cultural decadence.

where freud left his marx in the american home

There can be little doubt that the post-war popularity of the family melodrama in Hollywood is partly connected with the fact that in those years America discovered Freud. This is not the place to analyse the reasons why the United States should have become the country in which his theories found their most enthusiastic reception anywhere, or why they became such a decisive influence on American culture, but the connections of Freud with melodrama are as complex as they are undeniable. An interesting fact, for example, is that Hollywood tackled Freudian themes in a particularly 'romantic' or gothic guise, through a cycle of movies inaugurated possibly by Hitchcock's first big American success, *Rebecca.* Relating his Victorianism to the Crawford-Stanwyck-Davis type 'women's picture', which for obvious reasons became a major studio concern during the war years and found its apotheosis in such movies as John Cromwell's *Since You Went Away* (to the Front, that is), Hitchcock infused his film, and several others, with an oblique intimation of female frigidity producing strange fantasies of persecution, rape and death — masochistic rêveries and nightmares, which cast the husband into the rôle of the sadistic murderer. This projection of sexual anxiety and its mechanisms of displacement and transfer is translated into a whole string of movies often involving hypnosis and playing on the ambiguity and suspense of whether the wife is merely imagining it or whether her husband really does have murderous designs on her: Hitchcock's *Notorious* and *Suspicion,* Minnelli's *Undercurrent,* Cukor's *Gaslight,* Sirk's *Sleep My Love,* Tourneur's *Experiment Perilous,* Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door,* all belong in this category, as does Preminger's *Whirlpool,* and in a wider sense Renoir's *Woman on the Beach.* What strikes one about this list is not only the high number of European émigrés entrusted with such projects, but that virtually all of the major directors of family melodramas (except Ray)[9] in the 'fifties had a (usually not entirely successful) crack at the Freudian feminist melodrama in the 'forties.

More challenging, and difficult to prove, is the speculation that certain stylistic and structural features of the sophisticated melodrama may involve principles of symbolization and coding which Freud conceptualised in his analysis of dreams and later also applied in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life.* I am thinking less of the prevalence of what Freud called 'Symptomhandlungen' or 'Fehlhandlungen', that is, when people unconsciously make slips or otherwise project their inner states into interpretable overt behaviour. This is a way of symbolising and signalling attitudes common to the American cinema in virtually every genre and more directly attributable to the metonymic use of detail in the realist novel, rather than to any Freudian influence, though the novel is where Freud himself got it from, as he repeatedly admits. However, there is a certain refinement of this in the melodrama — it becomes part of the composition of the frame, more subliminally and unobtrusively transmitted to the spectator. When Minnelli's characters find themselves in an emotionally precarious or contradictory situation, it often affects the 'balance' of the visual composition — wine glasses, a piece of china or a trayful of drinks emphasise the fragility of their situation — e.g. Judy Garland over breakfast in *The Clock,* Richard Windmark in *The Cobweb* explaining himself to Gloria Grahame, or Gregory Peck trying to make his girlfriend see why he married someone else in *Designing Woman.* When Robert Stack in *Written on the Wind,* standing by the window he has just opened to get some fresh air into an extremely heavy family atmosphere, hears of Lauren Bacall expecting a baby, the most eloquent thing about his misery is the way he squeezes himself into the frame of the half-open window, every word his wife says to him bringing torment to his lacerated soul and racked body.

The bourgeois marriage ... mother-in-law, mother, bride in Hilda Crane

Along similar lines, I have in mind the kind of 'condensation' of motivation into metaphoric images or sequences of images mentioned earlier, the relation that exists in Freudian dream-work between manifest dream material and latent dream content. Just as in dreams certain gestures and incidents mean something by their structure and sequence, rather than by what they literally represent, the melodrama often works, as I have tried to show, by a displaced emphasis, by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections — that is, by poetic-dramatic devices in the service of subliminal drive-patterns. We know how in dreams one tends to 'use' as dream material incidents and circumstances from one's waking experience during the previous day, in order to 'code' them, while nevertheless keeping a kind of emotional logic going, and even condensing their images into what, during the dream at least, seems an inevitable sequence. The best melodramas often use middle-class American society, its iconography and the family experience in just this way as their manifest 'material', but 'displace' it into quite different patterns, juxtaposing stereotyped situations in strange configurations, provoking clashes and ruptures which not only open up new associations but also redistribute the emotional energies which suspense and tensions have accumulated, break down emotional barriers and let the libidinal energy aroused by the spectacle flow in disturbingly different directions. American movies, for example, often manipulate very shrewdly situations of extreme embarassment (a blocking of emotional energy) and acts or gestures of violence (direct or indirect release) in order to create patterns of aesthetic significance which only a musical vocabulary might be able to describe accurately, and for which a psychologist or anthropologist might offer some explanation.

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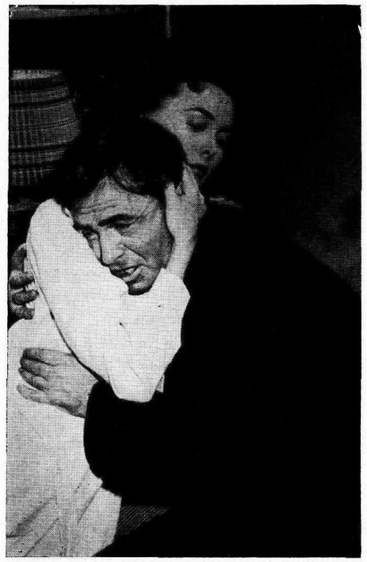
One of the more strictly aesthetic principles involved is that of continuity and discontinuity. To open a parenthesis here, it would seem that there are basically three types of continuity in the filmic discourse which can be played out against each other, and usually are. Continuity of story-line accompanied by visual discontinuity (change of angle, distance of shot, close-up, countershot, travelling etc.: even a bad director will have learnt how to vary the shot as much as possible in order to break up a static set-up say, in a dialogue sequence). More difficult to manipulate is a discontinuity on the level of the plot (ellipsis), and this is often bridged by a visual continuity, more or less obvious or subtle, say a camera movement followed by a tracking-in shot, a dissolve or any other



James Mason, Barbara Rush in Bigger Than Life

montage technique capable of creating metonymic chains of associations. Finally, there are the structural and dynamic continuities and discontinuities (what Sirk has called the 'rhythm of the plot') which are less easily defined, and nevertheless are what makes a movie hang together and give it in the last resort aesthetic shape and thematic coherence. These, it seems to me, are particularly complex and varied in the sophisticated melodrama, and I shall only outline one of the more obvious aspects. A typical situation in American melodramas is where the plot builds up to an evidently catastrophic collision of counter-running sentiments, but strings them out nonetheless to get the greatest possible effect from the clash when it does come. In Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* Lana Turner plays an alcoholic actress who has been 'rescued' by producer Kirk Douglas having given her a new start in the movies. After her first première, flushed with success, self-confident for the first time in years, and in happy anticipation of celebrating with Douglas, with whom she has fallen in love, she drives to his home armed with a bottle of champagne. However, we already know that Douglas isn't emotionally interested in her (' I need an actress, not a wife' he later tells her) and is spending the evening with a broad in his bedroom. Lana Turner, suspecting nothing, is met by Douglas at the foot of the stairs, and she, at first too engrossed in herself to notice how cool he is, gets it full in the face when the other girl suddenly appears at the top of the stairs in Douglas' dressing gown. There follows the scene of her nervous breakdown in the car with headlights flashing against her windscreen like a barrage of footlights and arc-lamps.

This letting-the-emotions-rise and then bringing them suddenly down with a thump is an extreme example of dramatic discontinuity, and a similar, vertiginous drop in the emotional temperature punctuates a good many melodramas — almost invariably played out against the vertical axis of a staircase.[10] In one of the most paroxysmic montage sequences that the American cinema has known, and constructed as if to illustrate the art of musical counterpoint, Sirk has Dorothy Malone in *Written on the Wind* dance on *her own, like some doomed goddess* from a dionysian mystery, while her father is collapsing on the stairs and dying from a heart-attack. Again, in *Imitation of Life,* John Gavin gets the brush-off from Lana Turner as they are going down some stairs, and in *All I Desire* Barbara Stanwyck has to disappoint her daughter about not taking her to New York to become an actress, after the girl has been rushing downstairs to tell her father the good news. Ray's use of the staircase for similar emotional effects is well-known and most spectacular in *Bigger than Life,* but to give an example from a more conventional director, Henry King, I'd like to quote a scene from *Margie,* a film following rather closely Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis,* where the heroine, Jeanne Crain, about to be taken to the graduation ball by a blind date (whom we know to be her father) since her poetry-loving bespectacled steady has caught a cold, comes tearing down from her bedroom when she hears that the French master, on whom she has *a crush, has dropped in. She virtually* rips the bouquet of flowers out of his hands and is overwhelmed by joy. The poor guy, with some embarassment, then has to explain that he is taking somebody else to the ball, that he has only come to return some papers, and Margie, mortified, humiliated and cringing with shame, has just enough time to get back upstairs before she completely dissolves in tears.

All this may not sound terribly profound on paper, but the orchestration of such a scene can produce some rather strong emotional effects and the strategy of building up to a climax so as to throttle it the more abruptly is a technique of dramatic reversal by which Hollywood has consistently criticised the streak of incurably naive moral and emotional idealism in the American psyche, first by showing it to be often indis*tinguishable from the grossest kind of* illusion and self-delusion, and then by forcing a confrontation when it is most wounding and contradictory. The emotional extremes are played off in such a way that they reveal an inherent dialectic, and the undeniable psychic energy contained in this seemingly so vulnerable sentimentality is utilised to furnish its own antidote, to bring home the discontinuities in the structures of emotional experience which make for a kind of realism and toughness rare if not unthinkable in the European cinema.

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What makes these discontinuities in the melodrama so effective aesthetically is that they occur, as it were, under pressure. Although the kinetics of the American cinema are generally directed towards creating pressure and manipulating it (as suspense, for example), the melodrama presents in some ways a special case. In the Western or the thriller, suspense is generated by the linear organisation of the plot and the action, together with the *kind of 'pressure' which the spectator* brings to the film by way of anticipation and *apriori* expectations of what he hopes to see; the melodrama, however, has to accommodate the latter type of pressure, as already indicated, in what amounts to a relatively 'closed' world.

This is emphasised by the function of the decor and the symbolisation of objects: the setting of the family melodrama almost by definition is the middle-class home, filled with objects, which in a film like Philip Dunne's *Hilda Crane,* typical of the genre in this respect, surround the heroine in a hierarchy of apparent order that becomes increasingly suffocating. From dad's armchair in the living room and mother's knitting, to the upstairs bedroom, where after five years' absence dolls and teddies are still neatly arranged on the bedspread, home not only overwhelms Hilda with images of parental oppression and a repressed past (which indirectly provoke her explosive outbursts that sustain the action), it also brings out the characteristic attempt of the bourgeois household to make time stand still, immobilise life and fix forever domestic property relations as the model of social life and a bulwark against the more disturbing sides in human nature. The theme has a particular poignancy in the many films about the victimisation and enforced passivity of women — women waiting at home, standing by the window, caught in a world of objects into which they are expected to invest their feelings. The Cromwell movie mentioned earlier, *Since You Went Away,* has a telling sequence when Claudette Colbert, having just taken her husband to the troop-train at the station, returns home to clear up after the morning's rush. Everything she looks at or touches, dressing-gown, pipe, wedding-picture, breakfast cup, slippers, shaving-brush, the dog, reminds her of her husband, until she can't bear it anymore and falls on her bed sobbing. The banality of the objects combined with the repressed anxieties and emotions force a contrast that makes the scene almost epitomise the relation of decor and people in the melodrama: the more the setting fills with objects to which the plot gives symbolic significance, the more the characters are enclosed in seemingly ineluctable situations. Pressure is generated by things crowding in on the characters, life becomes increasingly complicated because cluttered with obstacles and objects that invade the characters' personalities, take them over, stand for them, become more real than the human relations or emotions they were intended to symbolise.

On the staircase in Bigger Than Life: *Walter Matthau and James Mason*

It is yet again an instance of Hollywood stylistic devices supporting the themes, or commenting on each other if used by a conscious director. The melodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and/or the small-town setting, its emotional pattern is that of panic and latent hysteria, reinforced stylistically by a complex handling of space in interiors (Sirk, Ray and Losey particularly excel in this) and a 'thematisation' of objects which develop the existentialist antithesis of the individual in a closed society into the more directly philosophical point about a world totally predetermined and pervaded by 'meaning' and interpretable signs.

Perhaps this makes another recurrent feature, already touched on, that of desire focussing on the unobtainable object, i.e. the mechanisms of displacement and transfer, more plausible, since one can now see how in an enclosed field of pressure, they open a highly dynamic, yet discontinuous cycle of non-fulfilment, where the discontinuity reinforces the fixation, to create a universe of powerfully emotional, but obliquely related stimuli and responses. In the melodrama, when consciously employed, violence, the strong action, the dynamic movement, the full articulation and the fleshed-out emotions — so characteristic of the American cinema — become the very signs of the characters' alienation, and thus serve to formulate a devastating critique of the ideology that supports it.

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Minnelli and Sirk are exceptional directors in this respect not least because they can handle stories with four, five or sometimes six characters all tied up in a single configuration, and yet give each of them an even thematic emphasis and an independent point of view. Such skill involves a particularly 'musical' gift. It requires a highly organised formal structure and a sound dramatic conception, but also a very sensitive awareness of the harmonising potential contained in contrasting material and the thematic implications of different characters' motives. Films like *Home From the Hill, The Cobweb, Tarnished Angels* or *Written on the Wind* strike one as 'objective' films, since they do not have a central hero (even though there may be a gravitational pull towards one of the protagonists) and nonetheless they cohere, mainly because each of the characters' predicaments is made plausible in terms that relate to the problems of the others. The films are built architecturally, by a combination of structural tensions and articulated parts, and the overall design appears only retrospectively, as it were, when with the final coda of appeasement the edifice is complete and the spectator can stand back and look at the pattern. But there is, especially in the Minnelli movies, also a wholly 'subjective' dimension. The films (because the parts are so closely organised around a central theme or dilemma) can be interpreted as emanating from a single consciousness, which is testing or experiencing in dramatic form, the various options and possibilities flowing from an initially outlined moral or existential contradiction. In *The Cobweb* John Kerr wants both total self-expression and a defined human framework in which such freedom is meaningful, and George Hamilton in *Home From the Hill* wants to assume adult responsibilities while at the same time he rejects the standards of adulthood implied in his father's aggressive masculinity. In the latter the drama ends with a *'Freudian' resolution of the* father being eliminated at the very point when he has resigned himself to his loss of supremacy, but this is underpinned by a 'Biblical' one which fuses the mythology of Cain and Abel with that of Abraham blessing his first-born. The interweaving of motifs is achieved by a series of parallels and contrasts. Set in the South, the story concerns the relations of a mother's boy with his tough father, played by Robert Mitchum, whose wife so resents his having a bastard son (George Peppard) that she won't sleep with him again. The plot progresses through all the possible permutations of the basic situation: lawful son/natural son, sensitive George Hamilton/hypochondriac mother, tough George Peppard/tough Robert Mitchum, both boys fancy the same girl, Hamilton gets her pregnant, Peppard marries her, girl's father turns nasty against the lawful son because of the notorious sex-life of his father, etc. However, because the plot is structured as a series of mirror-reflections on the theme of fathers and sons, blood ties and natural affinities, Minnelli is able to give what amounts to an analytical portrait of the sensitive adolescent — but placed in a definite psychological and social context. The boy's consciousness, we realise, is made up of what are external forces and circumstances, his dilemma the result of his social position as heir to his father's estate, unwanted because felt to be undeserved, and an upbringing deliberately exploited by his mother in order to get even with his father, whose own position as a Texan land-owner and local big-shot forces him to compensate for his wife's frigidity by proving his virility with other women. The melodrama here becomes the vehicle for diagnosing a single individual in ideological terms and objective categories, while the blow-by-blow emotional drama creates the second level, where the subjective aspect (the immediate, and necessarily unreflected experience of the characters) is left intact. The hero's identity, on the other hand, emerges as a kind of picture-puzzle from the various pieces of dramatic action.

Home from the Hill is also a perfect example of the principle of substitute acts, mentioned earlier, which is Hollywood's way of portraying the dynamics of alienation. The whole story is kept going by pressure that is applied indirectly, and by desires that always chase unattainable goals: Mitchum forces George Hamilton to 'become a man' though he is temperamentally his mother's son, while Mitchum's 'real' son in terms of attitudes and character is George Peppard, whom he cannot acknowledge for social reasons. Likewise, Eleanor Parker puts pressure on her son in order to get at Mitchum, and Everett Sloane (the girl's father) takes out on George Hamilton the sexual hatred he feels against Mitchum. Finally, after his daughter has become pregnant he goes to see Mitchum to put pressure on him to get his son to marry the girl, only to break down when Mitchum turns the tables and accuses him of blackmail. It is a pattern which in an even purer form appears in *Written on the Wind:* Dorothy Malone wants Rock Hudson who wants Lauren Bacall who wants Robert Stack who just wants to die. *La Ronde à l'Américaine.* The point is that the melodramatic dynamism of these situations is used by both Sirk and Minnelli to make the emotional impact 'carry over' into the very subdued, apparently neutral, sequences of images that so often round off a scene and which thereby have a strong metaphoric quality.

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One of the characteristic features of melodramas in general is that they concentrate on the point of view of the victim: what makes the films mentioned above exceptional is the way they manage to present *all* the characters convincingly

as victims. The critique — the questions of 'evil', of responsibility — is firmly placed on a social and existential level, away from the arbitrary and finally obtuse logic of private motives and individualised psychology, which in art more often leads to a kind of barren naturalism. This is why the melodrama, at its most accomplished, seems capable of reproducing more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society, especially the relation between psychology, morality and class-consciousness, by emphasising so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressingly inward, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents. In Minnelli, Sirk, Ray, Cukor and others, alienation is recognised as man's basic condition, fate is secularised into the prison of social conformity and psychological neurosis, and the linear trajectory of self-fulfilment so potent in American ideology is twisted into the downward spiral of a self-destructive urge seemingly possessing a whole social class.

This typical masochism of the melodrama, with its incessant acts of inner violation, its mechanisms of frustration and over-compensation, is perhaps brought most into the open by the characters who have a drink problem (cf *Written on the Wind, Hilda Crane, Days of Wine and Roses*). Although alcoholism is too common an emblem in films and too typical of middle-class America to deserve a close thematic analysis, drink does become interesting in movies where its dynamic significance is developed and its qualities as a visual metaphor recognised: wherever characters are seen swallowing and gulping their drinks as if they were swallowing their humiliations along with their pride, vitality and the life-force have become palpably destructive, and a phoney libido has turned into real anxiety. *Written on the Wind* is perhaps the movie that most consistently builds on the metaphoric possibilities of alcohol (liquidity, potency, the phallic shape of bottles). Not only is its theme an emotional drought that no amount of alcohol, oil pumped by the derricks, or petrol in fast cars and planes can mitigate, but it also has Robert Stack compensate for his sexual impotence and childhood guilt feelings by hugging a bottle of raw corn every time he feels suicidal, which he proceeds to smash in disgust against the paternal mansion. In the same movie, Stack is making unmistakeable gestures with an empty Martini bottle in the direction of his wife, and an unconsummated relationship is visually underscored when two brimful glasses remain untouched on the table, as Dorothy Malone does her best to seduce an unresponsive Rock Hudson at the family party, having previously poured her whiskey into the flower vase of her rival, Lauren Bacall.

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Melodrama is often used to describe tragedy that doesn't quite come off: either because the characters think of themselves too self-consciously as tragic or because the predicament is too evidently fabricated on the level of plot and dramaturgy to carry the kind of conviction normally termed 'inner necessity'. Now, in some American screen melodramas the inadequacy of the character's responses to their predicament becomes itself part of the subject. In Cukor's *The Chapman Report* and Minnelli's *The Cobweb* — two movies explicitly concerned with the impact of Freudian notions on American society — the protagonists' self-understanding as well as the doctors' attempts at analysis and therapy are shown to be either tragically or comically inadequate to the situations that the characters are supposed to cope with in everyday life. Pocket-size tragic heroes and heroines, they are blindly grappling with a fate real enough to cause intense human anguish, which as the spectator can see, however, is compounded by social prejudice, ignorance, insensitivity on top of the bogus claim to scientific objectivity by the doctors. Claire Bloom's nymphomania and Jane Fonda's frigidity in the Cukor movie are seen to be two different but equally hysterical reactions to the heavy ideological pressures which American society exerts on the relations between the sexes. *The Chapman Report*, despite having apparently been cut to ribbons by Daryl F. Zanuck Jr., remains an extremely important movie partly because it treats its theme both in the tragic and the comic mode, without breaking apart, underlining thereby the ambiguous springs of the discrepancy between displaying intense feelings and the circumstances to which they are inadequate — usually a comic motif but tragic in its emotional implications.

Both Cukor and Minnelli, however, focus on how ideological contradictions are reflected in the characters' seemingly spontaneous behaviour — the way self-pity and self-hatred alternate with a violent urge towards some form of liberating action, which inevitably fails to resolve the conflict. The characters experience as a shamefully personal stigma what the spectator (because of the parallelisms between the different episodes in *The Chapman Report*, and the analogies in the fates of the seven principal figures of *The Cobweb*) is forced to recognise as belonging to a wider social dilemma. The poverty of the intellectual resources in some of the characters is starkly contheir society, one gets a clear picture of trasted with a corresponding abundance of emotional resources, and as one sees them helplessly struggling inside their emotional prisons with no hope of realising to what degree they are the victims of how a certain individualism reinforces social and emotional alienation, and of how the economics of the psyche are as vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation as is a person's labour.

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The point is that this inadequacy has itself a name, relevant to the melodrama as a form: irony or pathos, which both in tragedy and melodrama is the response to the recognition of different levels of awareness. It privileges the spectator vis-a-vis the protagonists, for he registers the difference as an aesthetic effect, rather misleadingly translated as 'pity' from Aristotle. Pathos results from non-communication or silence made eloquent — people talking at cross-purposes (Robert Stack and Lauren Bacall when she tells him she's pregnant in *Written on the Wind*), a mother watching her daughter's wedding from afar (Barbara Stanwyck in *Stella Dallas*) or a woman returning unnoticed to her family, watching them through the window (again Barbara Stanwyck in *All I Desire*) — where highly emotional situations are underplayed to present an ironic discontinuity of feeling or a qualitative difference in intensity, usually visualized in terms of spatial distance

Violence under Elms: Barbara Stanwyck and Lyle Bettger in All I Desire

and separation.

Such archetypal melodramatic situations activate very strongly an audience's participation, for there is a desire to make up for the emotional deficiency, to impart the different awareness, which in other genres is systematically frustrated to produce suspense: the primitive desire to warn the heroine of the perils looming visibly over her in the shape of the villain's shadow. But in the more sophisticated melodramas this pathos is most acutely produced through a 'liberal' mise-en-scène which balances different points of view, so that the spectator is in a position of seeing and evaluating contrasting attitudes within a given thematic framework — a framework which is the result of the total configuration and therefore inaccessible to the protagonists themselves. The spectator, say in Preminger's *Daisy Kenyon* or a Ray movie is made aware of the slightest qualitative imbalance in a relationship and also sensitised to the tragic implications which a radical misunderstanding or a misconception of motives might have, even when this is not played out in terms of a tragic ending.

If pathos is the result of a skilfully displaced emotional emphasis, it is frequently used in melodramas to explore psychological displacement through repression, usually in conjunction with the theme of inferiority; inadequacy of response in the American cinema often has an explicitly sexual code: male impotence and female frigidity — a subject which allows for thematisation in various directions: not only to indicate the kinds of psychological anxiety and social pressures which generally make people sexually unresponsive, but as metaphors of unfreedom in a more philosophical sense (Hitchcock's frigid heroines), or to interpret the mechanisms of overcompensation as a quasi-metaphysical 'overreaching' (as in Ray's *Bigger than Life)*. In Sirk, where the theme has an exemplary status, it is treated as a problem of 'decadence' — where intention, awareness, yearning, outstrip performance — sexual, social, moral. From the Willi Birgel character in *Zu Neuen Ufern* onwards, Sirk's most impressive characters are never up to the demands which their lives make on them, though some are sufficiently sensitive, alive and intelligent to feel and know about this inadequacy of gesture and response. It gives their pathos a tragic ring, because they take on suffering and moral anguish knowingly, as the just price for having glimpsed a better world and having failed to live it. A tragic self-awareness is called upon to compensate for lost spontaneity and energy, and in movies like *All I Desire* or *There's Always Tomorrow,* where as so often, the fundamental irony is in the titles themselves, this theme which has haunted the European imagination at least since Nietzsche, is absorbed into an American small-town atmosphere, often revolving around the questions of dignity and responsibility, and how to step down, how to yield when confronted with true talent and true vitality — in short, those qualities that dignity is called upon to make up for.

In the Hollywood melodrama characters made for operettas play out the tragedies of mankind (or at least those of American civilization). Small wonder they are constantly baffled and amazed, as Lana Turner is in *Imitation of Life,* about what is going on around them and within them. The contradiction of seeming and being, of intention and result, registers as a perplexing frustration, and an ever-increasing gap opens between the emotions and the reality they seek to reach. What strikes one as the true pathos is the very mediocrity of the human material, putting such high demands upon itself, trying to live up to an exalted vision of man, but instead living out the impossible contradictions that have turned the American dream into its proverbial nightmare, having been too often on the verge of hypocrisy, hysteria or plain stupidity. It makes the best American melodramas of the 'fifties not only critical social documents but genuine tragedies, despite, or rather because of the 'happy ending': they record some of the agonies that have accompanied the demise of the 'affirmative culture' spawned by liberal idealism, advocating with open, conscious irony that the remedy applied is more of the same. But even without the national disasters that have overtaken America in the last five years, this irony, too, almost seems now to belong to a different age.

Thomas Elsaesser

1 A. Filon, The English Stage, London 1897. Filon also offers an interesting definition of melodrama: 'When dealing with Irving, I asked the question, so often discussed, whether we go to the theatre to see a representation of life, or to forget life and seek relief from it. Melodrama solves this question and shows that both theories are right, by giving satisfaction to both desires, in that it offers the extreme of realism in scenery and language together with the most uncommon sentiments and events.'

2 See J Duvignaud, Sociologie du Théâtre, Par.s 1965 IV, 3 'Théâtre sans révolution, révolution sans théâtre'.

3 About the ideological function of C 19th Victorian melodrama, see M. W. Disher: 'Even in gaffs and saloons, melodrama so strongly insisted on the sure reward to be bestowed in this life upon the law-abiding that sociologists now see in this a Machiavellian plot to keep democracy servile to Church and State. (. . .). There is no parting the two strains, moral and political, in the imagination of the nineteenth-century masses. They are hopelessly entangled. Democracy shaped its own entertainments at a time when the vogue of Virtue Triumphant was at its height and they took their pattern from it. (. . .) Here are Virtue Triumphant's attendant errors: confusion between sacred and profane, between worldly and spiritual advancement, between self-interest and self-sacrifice . . . . (Blood and Thunder, London 1949, pp 13–14). However, it ought to be remembered that there are melodramatic traditions outside the puritan-democratic world view: Catholic countries, such as Spain, Mexico (c.f. Bunuel's Mexican films) have a very strong line in melodramas, based on the themes of atonement and redemption. Japanese melodramas have been 'high-brow' since the Monogatari stories of the C 16th, and in Mizoguchi's films (*O Haru, Shinheike Monogatari*) they reach a transcendence and stylistic sublimation rivalled only by the very best Hollywood melodramas.

4 Hanns Eisler, Composing for Film, London 1951.

5 Lilian Ross, Picture, London (Penguin) 1958.

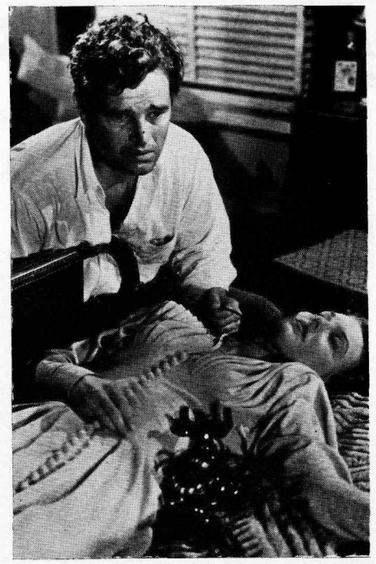
6 The impact of *Madame Bovary* via Willa Cather on the American cinema and the popular imagination would deserve a closer look.

7 *Brighton Film Review* nos 14, 15, 21.

8 *ibid* nos 19, 20.

9 I have not seen *A Woman's Secret* (1949) or *Born ot Be Bad* (1950), either of which might include Ray in this category, and the Ida Lupino character in *On Dangerous Ground* (1952) — blind, living with homicidal brother — is distinctly reminiscent of this masochistic strain in Hollywood feminism.

10 As a principle of mise-en-scène the dramatic use of staircases recalls the famous *Jessner-treppe* of German theatre. The thematic conjunction of family and height/depth symbolism is nicely described by Max Tessier: 'le héros ou l'héroïne sont ballotés dans un véritable scenic-railway social, où les classes sont rigoureusement compartimentées. Leur ambition est de quitter à jamais un milieu moralement dépravé, physiquement éprouvant, pour accéder au Nirvana de la grande bourgeoisie. (. . .) Pas de famille, pas de mélo! Pour qu'il y ait mélo, il faut avant tout qu'il y ait faute, péché, transgression sociale. Or, *quel est le milieu idéal* pour que se développe cette gangrène, sinon cette celluie familiale, liée à une conception hiérarchique de la société?' (*Cinéma 71,* no 161, p 46).



Tom Neal and Ann Savage in Ulmer's Detour

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Aspects of Melodrama

every article about the cinema ought to talk about Griffith

(Godard)

The 'United Artists'
Griffith, Pickford, Chaplin

In general, melodrama is a term of little critical value; it has been so corrupted in common usage that to give it a more specific field of reference is a task which almost verges on the impossible. On the other hand, it ought to be attempted because of the important role that melodrama has played in American culture and because of the influence it has exercised over the development of the American cinema.

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Melodrama is both vague and highly pejorative largely because it designates an area of exclusion rather than inclusion — that is to say, everything that does not fall within the purview of bourgeois drama and the well-made play. Melodramatic is everything that violates criteria of verisimilitude and probability that a middle class audience has become disposed to accept — where this audience demands a realism in terms of milieu, costume and gesture; in the presentation of social class and class differences; a concern with motivation that will faithfully reflect the balancing of various considerations and the felicific calculus that characterises ordinary life, melodrama is frankly indifferent to these considerations: it is romantic, escapist and flies in the face of every reasonable expectation.

Characteristic of melodrama is:

(a) a tendency to place the hero and/or heroine on a privileged level;

(b) strong audience identification and a tendency to dissolve the boundary between what a character feels and what the audience feels;

(c) a disinterest in nuances of social class and a tendency to rank characters, not socially, but across a sharply defined moral spectrum of good and evil;

(d) a tendency to work the action towards bold and effective climaxes and strong local effects, which are presented for their own sake;

(e) the use of spectacle and the inclusion of dramatic action or suspense sequences;

(f) the unmotivated, unprepared, unexpected and immediate;

(g) a rigging of the development of the action in the direction of wish-fulfillment with a consequent tendency to evade rather than to resolve the conflicts that have been the focus of the drama.

Both the melodrama and the bourgeois novel are conditioned by puritan ideology; in both the conception of life as a long and weary journey through a vale of tears and tribulations, for which fortitude and a certain stoicism are essential character traits, is accompanied by the expectation that, in the long run, virtue will be rewarded here on earth — in defiance both of dogma and of strict probability.

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In America the norms of bourgeois drama were slow to establish themselves. Puritanism for long inhibited the development of the theatre and it was only in the late nineteenth century that the basis for such a drama emerged: both materially, in terms of a fashionable monied class willing and able to support theatre and the opera, and thematically, in the form of a comedy of manners that could centre on conflicts between old and new money, between native and foreign aristocracies (in James and Wharton as well as in the theatre). However, by this time the melodrama was already well-established. Bronson Howard, America's first professional dramatist, was reared in the traditions of melodrama even though he came to write social plays. David Belasco, one of the most successful of the new impresarios who appeared at the end of the century was a melodrama specialist, who amongst other things, was the source for the libretto of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. Strong, emotive, often sentimental stories of this kind became a staple of American culture — in the theatre, on the silent screen, in the new art of the 'musical'. And even a writer like Eugene O'Neill owes far more to the traditions of American melodrama, than he does to the European well-made play.

The cinema proved to be admirably adapted to the demands of melodrama: it was ideal for action and spectacle; intercutting created new forms of suspense; Griffith's invention of the close-up placed the star on a priviledged level and created a strong sense of audience involvement. The silent cinema was the culmination of melodrama, creating an oneiric world of fantasy and desire. However, all this was shattered by the coming of sound. The importance of dialogue, gesture, intonation, the corresponding demand for a greater verisimilitude led to the eclipse of melodrama in favour of the sophistication of skills of the European well-made play — a turning point that was reflected in the supremacy of Lubitsch.

However, there can be little doubt that much of what we value in the American cinema today stems from this melodrama tradition in general, and from Griffith's specific translation of it into the film medium. It is, of course, easy to lay stress on the crudities, on the moral stereotypes and the element of wishfulfillment, and the forcing of situations into well-run and familiar channels continues to be the most significant limiting factor in the American cinema but against that, there is the real complexity and immediacy of the relationship which an audience establishes with a star, the tendency to respond to characters as individuals rather than to rank them socially, the effective dissolution of moral and social taboos which identification with a star and a situation can create, the readiness to risk strong, sentimental, even embarassing scenes, to resort to and go beyond cliché. The American cinema has been heavily self-censored and severely curtailed and constricted in its scope, yet for all that it has been strangely uninhibited. For in the cinema, love, hate, grief, joy, eroticism, violence cease to be concepts and verbal counters and become realities which the spectator must confront and reckon with.

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Ford's *Pilgrimage* (1933) seems to me a classic instance of the doublesidedness of the American cinema's tradition of melodrama. The story itself is crude, corny and sentimental yet in the hands of Ford it acquires moments of authenticity and is often genuinely moving. Ford alternates scenes of slapstick and uproarious humour with incidents of extreme seriousness with quite astonishing boldness, without subordinating one to the other and without trying to establish some kind of equalisation between them. Each scene is done for its own sake and it is this that guarantees the picture's integrity. In the past great art has been notable for the skill and sophistication of its transitions, in a way that implies mutual subordination and an organic relation of parts (e.g. the theory of 'comic relief'). Yet Ford's swift transitions and changes of tone are impressive because they fully convey the disconnectedness and lack of significant relation between different areas of experience. The power of the moment in *Wagonmaster* (1950), when the arrival of the outlaws breaks up the dance on the wagon train is that (as so often in the films of Ford) it registers so dramatically the gulf between different worlds — moreover in its expressive use of montage — a sequence of silent close-ups on the faces of the intruders — it makes effective use of the stylistic tradition of the silent cinema.

Thus, more generally, if the American cinema has developed out of melodrama it has also developed prophylactics against it: it has found ways of tapping the crude power of melodrama while subtly reconstituting the elements in such a way as to bypass the dangers of moralism and sentimentality. For melodrama undoubtedly is moralistic and never more so than in its heart-warming or heart-rending conclusions. As Sirk himself pointed out in a recent discussion, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* is not melodrama, because of its episodic nature and because of the fragmentation of the narrative line. What distinguishes the work of Sirk, from that of, say, a David Lean, is that he does not allow the whole significance of the action to go into one or two episodes. Meaning is articulated through the total pattern of events and the dangers of the picturesque, so evident in Lean, are decisively skirted. And by the picturesque, I mean the tendency for certain scenes to be composed in such a way that they are separated from the rest of the action, as if surrounded by a frame, so that the audience is invited to shut their eyes to the implications of the scene when set against a wider context. The scene does not carry the weight of the whole film behind it but serves as a kind of surrogate for the fact that this cannot be achieved.

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Directors like Sirk and Tourneur are able to condition an audience's response to the work by the way in which they juxtapose scenes, throw unexpected elements into prominence, while presenting conventional conclusions in a purely formal way. Thus, to take a case in point, there is no exhilaration at all in the ending of *Canyon Passage* as Dana Andrews rides west. It is presented quite neutrally — as if to say, well, this is how a film like this ends — and the conclusions cannot contradict the sombre tone of the rest of the film. Minnelli and Preminger go for strong scenes but they are always aware of the need to work for their effects and to convince an audience of the reality of a character's predicament. In the game of melodrama the stakes were always high and it was a matter of all or nothing — sometimes the director succeeded, but on other occasions the material proved intractable. That, so often, has been the story of the American cinema. Yet this crude melodrama produced movies that were artistically far superior to the sophisticated melodrama of today, which lacks the vital energy of its predecessors, and which instead of subverting its more debased effects, actually works very hard at reinforcing them. Perhaps this reflects a greater awareness of the relationship between melodrama and ideology, a willingness to accept, or acquiesce in the fact that the project may be corrupted from the start.

David Morse

some affairs to remember: the style of Leo McCarey

Cary Grant, Deborah Kerr in An Affair to Remember

The notion of the individual artist in Hollywood has always manifested itself in terms of the struggle with the conventions of the genre, and much of the most interesting work done in the classical American Cinema reflects just this conflict, the tension resulting from conventions stretched to the limit by the exigencies of an individual vision. But it is important to remember the part that tradition is here playing in its own imminent destruction: it is an almost suicidal one, showing what is both strength and limitation. In its cinema, America has always displayed an irksome self-awareness and self-criticism, particularly in the alien vision of its emigrés, and operating on two levels, both as criticism of its social foundations (cf. the films of Lang) and through an oblique viewpoint on the springs of energy at the root of the action ethos (cf. the work of Jacques Tourneur).

Nevertheless, it remains true that the tradition to which directors as critical as Lang and Tourneur can be traced is that of the largely original, indigenous narrative forms of the American Cinema — particularly in the work of the former one finds the gradual shedding of his expressionist background, culminating in *Fury* (1936), an excellent example of how Hollywood incorporated and usurped extraneous influences.

The above remarks are straightforward enough: my object is to relate them to current discussion of the role of the melodrama in the American Cinema, centred on the use certain directors have made of the genre: if we are to believe recent criticism, Minnelli has used it as the foundation for a reality/fantasy dialectic (and one critic has even seen fit to lump McCarey and Borzage in with this idea), and, more importantly, the highly-charged symbolism of Douglas Sirk has inverted it so as to entirely disassociate the director's films from the prevalent 'bourgeois' ideology expounded in the melodrama. I am not at all persuaded that such a disassociation in fact takes place, and I feel that it would be a mistake to interpret a critical viewpoint as a rejection of the emotional structure propounded continually by the narrative techniques that Hollywood established, an emotional structure which cannot be separated from the 'bourgeois' ideology of the American Cinema. But to clarify this, one needs to make some general remarks on the nature of the melodrama itself.

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The history of the melodrama is partly static, insofar as it is uniquely bound up with the familiar Hollywood technique of the re-make. But the genre begins to reveal itself in the fifties, when the formal conventions of the American Cinema were on the wane, although to pinpoint such a crack-up exactly is naturally almost impossible, and varies from genre to genre. It seems to me that the melodrama — a specifically 'human' genre, depicting stylised situation, characters, and relationships not so far removed from ordinary experience as the western or the musical — was Hollywood's typical response to the relaxed censorship of the period, the demand for a more 'adult' kind of entertainment, and the challenge of tv. The demand was for a more realistic kind of treatment, the depiction of conflicts removed from the comfortable metaphors of genre. But the paradox is that at the moment when American films might appear to be treating of these more realistic situations (specifically those of middle-class America), they become more intensely *symbolic,* more highly stylised than previously. The reason is quite simple: with the demise of genre, Hollywood's style was bereft of its primary means of expression, its system of conventions hitherto applicable to large areas of human experience. A profusion of metaphors, privileged to treat unspoken areas of this experience went overboard with this decline in their validity: and the result was almost a return to an early primitivism whereby the American Cinema fell back on a dramatic codification of mere, ordinary 'reality', thereby pushing situation more explicitly into symbol. The pegs on which earlier schemes of narrative had hung had been pulled out, and in the myth of middle-class America more pegs had to be found. I think that the self-consciousness that has destroyed the traditional Hollywood started here, for the American Cinema found itself searching its own psyche for means of expression: and the response was to push events of a common reality to the myth of extremes, ransacking it for simplifications. The finest American melodramas bear this out if one comes to consider their extraordinary obsession with ritual and catharsis, situations extrapolated to their furthest degree, towards death and expiation. In *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), Sirk carries the plot through to Rock Hudson's near-death at the precise moment when he is on the verge of resuming his relationship with Jane Wyman, before pulling us back to the coda of the happy ending. In *Some Came Running* (1959), Minnelli shows us in sacrificial terms the inevitable death of the innocent, Shirley MacLaine, as a necessary element in the spiritual regeneration of the film's hero. In *Strangers When We Meet* (1960), Quine demonstrates that architect Kirk Douglas must construct and finish his dream house with its symbolic relation to his ideal but illicit affair with Kim Novak before realising that they can never live in it: and so on. But at the moment when Hollywood seems to be stabbing at realism, the means of expression must essentially be understood in symbolic terms. At a time when Hollywood's law of apparent verisimilitude is most stringently in operation, surface reality has been replaced by an entirely symbolic world, America's final fling at a coherent understanding of itself.

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These are prefatory and generalised remarks which I would like to try to justify in part by consideration of a late film by a very underestimated director, Leo McCarey. He has always been seen as a director in an improvised, slapstick tradition — we recall that Sarris sees him 'noted less for his rigorous direction than for his relaxed digressions'. His movie *An Affair to Remember* (1957) is an unashamed remake of his own *Love Affair* (1939), but it strikes one less by any improvised qualities that it might possess (indeed, the one clearly improvised scene, the children song in the class-room is a disaster) than by its extraordinary formal direction. As a great director of actors, McCarey often obtains his effects by the expressions and the gestures of his players: and it makes his mise-en-scene extremely difficult to evaluate in other than completely subjective terms, for where one director might employ a camera movement or a lighting effect to make a point, McCarey will invariably rely on a close-up of the performer. Paradoxically then, *An Affair to Remember* is comprised of an absolutely formal symbolic development which is the key to its mise-en-scene, although McCarey will only see this development as the most inevitable manner of expressing the world in which the love-affair takes place: put more simply, the one is the necessary means of demonstrating the other, bound together in a narrative constantly employed in the moral 'fake' of the contingent now known as the illusionist method. Style then is sublimated in the story of the central characters, ageing playboy Nicky Ferante, and night-club singer Terry McKay. Two complementary images demonstrate this, and they are essential to an understanding of McCarey's method and the melodrama genre. (a) Ferrante and Terry have arranged to give their love a test period of six months, after which they will meet on top of the Empire State Building. Terry is up on the roof of a penthouse, belonging to the man she was previously going to marry: in the glass doorway to the left of the cinemascope frame, she tells him that she is in love with Ferante, and then leans back against the door which swings out to reflect the Empire State Building in its frame. (b) In the final scene of the movie, Nicky bursts through a door of Terry's apartment to see a picture that he has painted on the wall: its presence there immediately tells him that Terry only missed their date because she has been physically prevented from keeping it. Nicky is, like Terry, on the left-hand side of the screen, and on the right the picture is seen in the frame of a large mirror. The images are deliberately at crucial moments in the movie, and what is important is the symbolic quality of their framing. For McCarey, the Empire State Building and the painting are not so much real at a primary level, but at a symbolic remove: their importance is as an image, an expression of the central relationship. As symbols, they are themselves testaments to the melodrama's method, as the American Cinema's most intense expression of a reality whose contingencies have been stylised into a rigorous symbolic code whose function is the ultimate elucidation of harmony and coherence.

Naturally, the images represent a culmination of the threads of symbolic action in the movie. *An Affair to Remember* is constructed on two such threads: images of dualism, of the couple, and rhetorically heightened by a doubled process — a dialectic of height and depth. In the first thread, we may count the scene where both Nicky and Terry read letters from their respective fiancées, the formal framing of their unwitting table seating back to back in the ship's restaurant, the scene of the two pink champagnes at the ship's bar, and the two complementary scenes at the grandmother's house, before and after her death. These last scenes are particularly important, the audience doing the work of the director by a kind of dialectic manifested entirely in terms of emotion. In the first scene, when Nicky and Terry visit the former's mother, McCarey's framing is very formal, with characters symmetrically placed on the left, on the right and in the centre on the Cinemascope screen. One time, it is the grandmother in the centre playing the piano with Nicky on the left and Terry on the right, while a second time, Nicky unites the two women at the centre of the frame, as they all have tea together. He returns to the house alone after his grandmother's death, and by repeating the same framing, McCarey wills us to a highly-charged but reflective re-enactment of the previous occasion, instilling the household objects (the piano, the chairs, the painting, the shawl) with a symbolic quality that the structure of the melodrama consistently imparts to the reality that it stylises.

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The image of the Empire State Building mentioned above is the culmination of the height-depth dialectic in the movie; throughout *An Affair to Remember*, this dialectic provides the dynamics for the themes. Firstly, we have the notion that Nicky, on his own admittance, places women on an idealistic pedestal and such immaturity is what the trajectory of the film's rhythm will demolish. A first high point of the relationship is up on a forward deck of the ocean liner when the couple read their respective letters: Nicky and Terry are framed with the other passengers on a lower level behind them. Terry's tentative goodbye at this point is indicated by her half-descent on a ladder leading up to the deck level. In the scene of the first kiss, this same descent/ascent is used as the expression of hesitancy: the couple half-descend a ladder, then kiss midway between decks and out of frame, before descending completely. The gesture of Terry's hand on the stair-rail conveys all we need to know about what the kiss symbolises. Similarly the ideal landscape of the grandmother's garden and chapel is high up overlooking the sea, but this idealism and peace is not at that time consonant with the way the relationship must develop. A ritualistic situation of extremes such as I have mentioned is necessary to test the relationship at a point when it seems to be on the verge of success: such then, is Terry's accident as she goes to keep her date with Nicky, and her own remark on it is integrated into the metaphors of the film's moral — 'I was looking up'. In a neat reversal of the imagery, McCarey makes Nicky's lowest moment in the rhythm of the film the hours he spends on top of the Empire State Building, dejectedly standing to the left of the frame, and isolated from the communal rhythm expressed by the elevator.

Thus, McCarey's intensely formal mise-en-scene: consonant with the ritualistic quality of the melodrama, which has now degenerated into the 'rhythm' of the set-piece in most current Hollywood productions, where a sense of ritual is grafted arbitrarily on any piece of action, regardless of the themes. *An Affair to Remember,* by contrast, is fully representative of the Hollywood melodrama tradition in its simplified depiction of a reality now stripped of genre situations. Hence, the idea of the cliché-image: instead of a formal set of conventions from which to select a means of expression, any aspect of reality has a potentially symbolic character, to be integrated into a condensed rhythm elaborating the most classic moral trajectory. As ever, the abstractions of Hollywood's major themes are parallelled by intense stylisation — so nature becomes a question of deers and Christmas-trees as in Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows,* symbols wholly representative of the mainstream American narrative tradition. It is not a question of rejecting the 'ideology' of Hollywood: it is to embrace a rhetoric as a means to an end. Adherence to the form implies belief in the validity of the mechanism of expression, and an acceptance of the essentially primitive quality of this rhetoric is necessary to any appreciation of the Hollywood melodrama. Above all, it is necessary to view these symbols in the context of the emotive rhythm of the films themselves. As Godard said in his celebrated review of Sirk's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die,* 'the important thing . . . is to believe in what you are doing by making the audience believe in it.'[2] The melodrama is the cinema of illusion, of emotional manipulation; and as so often, manipulation is the artist's means of revealing truth.

Peter Lloyd

1 P. Willeman, 'Distanciation and Douglas Sirk' *Screen* Summer 1971, p. 66.
2 'Tears and Speed' — Jean Luc Godard, see *Screen* Summer 1971, p. 97.

An oppressive gift . . . Nazi hospitality in A Time to Love and a Time to Die

souls made great by love and adversity: Frank Borzage

Drawing him back through space ... Trina in A Man's Castle

One of the reasons that melodrama — and great film-makers like D W Griffith and Frank Borzage who work its conventions — remains in critical disrepute is that it tends to externalise, to transform, a character's inner conflicts into externa! events.[1] Nineteenth century melodramatic literature traditionally presents two-dimensional characters, often at the mercy of a hostile environment or an extension of that environment (villain). Though the genre's lack of complexity has a primitive 'purity' to it, it becomes, if handled poorly, its chief drawback and greatest limitation. The best — that of Dickens, Ibsen, Chekhov — makes use of the melodramatic form but avoids its flaws. By adding depth to characterisation through descriptive detail, it steers clear of simplistic externalisations of conflict. Griffith and Borzage, like their literary predecessors, use and believe in the melodrama as a way of seeing the world but also, by shifting their focus from the melodramatic situation itself to the *characters in that* situation, they gave the form a new dimension; Griffith's and Borzage's wholehearted commitment to a melodramatic world view, apparent in the intensity of feeling behind each shot in their films, invests their work with a transcendent emotional level because it confers upon the characters presented an integrity which is a sign of both innocence and vitality.

What distinguishes Borzage's melodramas from Griffith's is their spirituality. Where Griffith concerns himself primarily, like Dickens, with the restitution of the family unit or the creation of a new family-like unit, Borzage's interests lie chiefly in the salvation of his characters — not with external but internal order.

Where Griffith's characters posess an irrepressible physical vitality — a vitality which makes his films immediate and direct — Borzage's characters radiate from within a unique, spiritual energy that makes them seem luminously unreal. Yet Borzage's characters also project a captivating but wholly innocent sensuality; they possess a fascinating mixture of spiritual purity and physical attractiveness. Where Griffith tends to evoke either madonna-like innocence (Gish) or wholesome physicality (Dempster), Borzage inextricably combines both these qualities in his characters (Farrell, Gaynor). This sensuality of Borzage's characters is rooted in their Edenic ignorance of the state of sin; it denies an awareness of physical corporeality. In short, Borzage's films concern themselves more with the exploration of the essences behind physical reality: unlike Griffith, he attempts to deal purely with the souls of his characters.

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Borzage himself explains that 'in every face I see I find a story. It doesn't seem hard. The story is right there lying on top, easily visible. You can take it and make something real, vital out of it... By face I don't mean face literally... I mean the characters in my story.'[2] Borzage's inarticulateness is only verbal. The first few shots of *Street Angel* (1928), perhaps the director's greatest silent film, describe this spirituality — the stories behind faces — far better than words ever could. The first title of the film sets the mood: 'Everywhere... in every town ... in every street... we pass, unknowing, human souls made great by love and adversity.' After this remarkably explicit title, Borzage's camera wanders through the crowded streets of Naples, observing policemen making their rounds in the market place, lovers walking arm in arm, a beggar girl sitting desolately at the foot of some stairs, circus gypsies arguing with a sausage vendor. Finally, Borzage cuts to an apartment in which a doctor is telling a girl (Angela) that she must buy some medicine in order to save her sick mother.

Each character we encounter in the opening shots of the film (similar to a later scene in which Gino looks for Angela in the crowded streets) has some story behind him and each wears that story on his face. By shooting the sequence and directing the actors as he does, Borzage captures the essence of their stories — he penetrates beneath the physical surface of every action, every gesture, and every face. Though all the stories occur independently of one another, Borzage ties them together into a single, spiritual event by use of connective camera movement and editing. This makes no sense logically, as it would in Griffith, but it does work intuitively, to define the limits of the spiritual system that exists in the film. Yet in this and most other Borzage films it is much less rigid and limited than the term 'spiritual system' implies. In fact, the beauty of the opening sequence in *Street Angel* rests on the complexity of characterisation which prevents any inflexible schematization of spiritual values.

Borzage's love relationships in *Street Angel* and other films reveals a highly visual romanticism with roots in the spiritual transparency of his characters, deliberately set off against the sordidness of the social condition. Angela, escaping from the police when arrested for theft while soliciting, runs away with the circus gypsies and eventually meets Gino, an itinerant artist. When they fall in love, Gino paints her portrait. His painting, a fantastic metaphor for the film itself, captures her not as she is, but as he sees her (her soul). In order to eat, they sell the painting to an art dealer. Yet even though it has been sold, the painting and its absence exert a powerful influence on the lovers. When Borzage cuts to shots of the bare wall where the painting was hung, the empty space conveys even more directly the painting's metaphysical significance. Meanwhile, the art dealer, hoping to make a great deal of money on Gino's painting, hires another artist to retouch it and to forge out of it an Old Master. Several times during the film Borzage cuts back to the painting of Angela: as she herself becomes more and more transformed by her love for Gino, the painting, now depicting a madonna, has also undergone a transformation.

The parallel is both ironic and symbolically true, and when Angela, without Gino's knowledge, is taken back to jail after spending her last hour with him, Borzage cuts to a shot of the forger painting a halo over her head.

Borzage's editing of love sequences, in its total disregard for physical space, goes beyond the surfaces of specific places or actions directly to the spiritual origins of his 'overs' relationships. In his first sound film, *Sound O' My Heart* (1930), the lovers, Sean and Mary, are separated, first by a forced marriage of her to another man and, then, by sheer physical distance. When Sean sings 'The Rose of Tralee' just before he leaves Ireland for a concert tour in the US, Mary, hearing their old love song, is drawn across the village to him and stands in his doorway, listening to him sing. Later, as Sean sings the same song in a New York concert, Borzage cuts back to (the dying) Mary in Ireland looking out of her window at falling leaves and, seemingly, listening to a song that is sung thousands of miles away. Similarly, in *I've Always Loved You* (1946) former lovers Myra Hassman and Leopold Goronoff, her piano teacher, play the same piece of music on the piano at the same moment, though miles apart. By cutting back and forth between the lovers, Borzage creates a strong, spiritual bond between them.

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This spiriutal quality of Borzage's love relationships is partly achieved by the narrative backgrounds with which they are contrasted: the hostile environments of war or depression or both appear at the same time as the obstacle to their happiness and the very condition of their love. *Seventh Heaven* (1927), *Farewell to Arms* (1932), *A Man's Castle* (1933), *Little Man, What Now?* (1934), *Three Comrades* (1938), *The Mortal Storm* (1940) and *Till We Meet Again* (1944) all contain hostile backgrounds which Borzage's central characters ultimately transcend. Yet the often-chaotic worlds which surround these characters are no more 'real' in a physical sense than the characters themselves are. In other words, the backgrounds do not impose real or physical danger on the central characters; the chaos of the backgrounds is not a physical but a spiritual one. In *Farewell to Arms* when Lieut. Frederick Henry, deserting the Italian army (including his cynical friend, Major Rinaldi, and what Rinaldi represents), goes back to search for Catherine Barkley, his lover, Borzage surrounds him with scenes of death, destruction, explosions, and horrible human misery in the ranks of the wounded and retreating soldiers. Lt. Henry's search for Catherine, set in the midst of all this spiritual bleakness, becomes a metaphorical journey and, because of the strength and explicitness of its images, the sequence emerges as one of the most powerful direct thematic statements in the film.

The background of *Little Man, What Now?*, set in the post-war depression of '20s Germany, is filled with voices crying out in the streets — voices like that of the speaker in the park who preaches equality in the film's rain-drenched opening sequence, or cynics like the communist who blames 'them' for the death of his wife, or emotionally twisted characters like the grotesque Kleinholz family or the crazy relationship between Mia Pinnenberg and her dog. It is the spiritual message of these voices that threatens Hans Pinnenberg, not the physical fact of economic depression. Only the innocence and purity of his relationship with Lammchen — symbolised in part by the birth of their child at the end of the film — enables Hans to escape the human wasteland that surrounds him. *A Man's Castle* is played against the background of the American Depression — yet Borzage sees that Depression in terms of its spiritual, not economic chaos. As a result, Bill's aimlessness, represented by his attraction to the sound of the train whistle, and the cynical assurance in his seeming self-sufficiency and independence — an aspect of his character reflected in the self-centred grotesqueness of his promotional costumes (he becomes a walking neon sign, a clown on stilts) — endanger the purity of his relationship with Trina. Even the grim background of war in *The Mortal Storm* or *Till We Meet Again* is less materially hostile than spiritually suffocating to Borzage's characters. In *The Mortal Storm,* set in pre-Nazi Germany, fascism becomes an insane social-political backdrop to Borzage's family melodrama: a family fights against an externalised system of evil which threatens to destroy its cohesiveness. On one level, the film works as allegory — Borzage treats the disintegration of the Roth family as a microcosm for the greater collapse of the state and the world. Yet Borzage's handling of the narrative material is less political than moral and spiritual.[4] When Professor Roth's stepsons, Otto and Erich, and his best student, Fritz (also his daughter's fiancé and, as such, would-be member of the family), reveal their conversion to fascism at the professor's birthday party, their betrayal emerges as a betrayal of a system of general, spiritual values more than of a specific political or religious belief.[5] Borzage's editing here, first isolating, then grouping various characters together according to their beliefs, transforms the family from one based originally on ties of blood to one based on a more abstract, yet stronger bond of mutuality and affinity of spirit.

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As the family seems to crumble around the professor, what emerges is a new alliance of souls: Freya, becoming more and more disillusioned with Fritz's gradual Nazification, grows closer to Martin, another of her father's students. Borzage's alignment of characters according to spiritual affinity creates two distinct outlooks in the film. Though one seems to overwhelm the other — the professor dies in a concentration camp, Mrs. Roth and her youngest son go to Switzerland, Freya tries to escape from Germany with Martin but is shot by Fritz and dies in Martin's arms on the Swiss border — the grotesque brutality and barbaric consequences of that outlook take their toll on those who try to adhere to it. In the last few shots of the film, Borzage reaffirms the transcendence of the professor's vision. Otto and Erich visit their now-deserted home. Fritz enters and tells them of Freya's death. After Fritz has gone, they argue about what has happened to their family and Erich, the more dogmatic Nazi, also leaves. Otto, transformed by what he has learned, walks about the empty house; Borzage's tracking camera shows us what he sees and suggests what he remembers. Then, when Otto also departs, the camera, after a moment or two, follows him outside and tracks down the Roth's walk to their gate, focusing on Otto's footprints in the snow as they slowly fill in with new-fallen snow before our eyes.

The power and beauty of this ending, like that of *Farewell To Arms* in which Lt. Henry holds his dead 'wife' in his arms as peace is announced (Borzage cuts to a shot of pigeons flying), lies in the complexity of feelings it evokes. The disillusionment of Otto with the rigid Nazi dogma that has destroyed his family suggests his conversion to a new awareness. Yet the cost at which this conversion comes, the loss of all that once had meaning for him, qualifies his transformation.

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In *Till We Meet Again,* Sister Clothilde's fear of the outside world, brilliantly visualised in her attempts to shut out — through prayer — the gunshots she hears in the film's first sequence, defines that world in terms of its spiritual threat to her. Though Clothilde tries melodramatically to externalise the forces of evil and to locate them solely in the outside world, Borzage, going beyond the limited vision of any one of his characters, under-

Angela's portrait in Street Angel

cuts the novice's self-confidence and untested surety in her faith by using that world to make trial of her spiritually. For Borzage, Clothilde's cloistered saintliness gives her spiritual aspirations no meaning because she has only *escaped* not *transcended* the outside world. Her contact with that world, with the aviator and his system of values in particular, deepens her faith and leads her to a more profound understanding of what religion really is. Her crucifixion at the end of the film, representing conversion to a more complex spirituality, marks her transcendence of both the outside world and the cloister. In *Till We Meet Again*, as in other films, Borzage is rarely specific. If the film contains a conversion to a spiritual system, that system is defined more by its flexibility than its orthodoxy. Borzage's characters' transcendence, as a result, is the more moving because they attain a state that is not restricted, defined or limited by dogmatic ideas or set beliefs.

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In *Mannequin* (1937), the tangible reality of a light bulb on Jessie's tenement stairway is less important than the intangible flickering it emits. Though the source of the light is shown and the heroine can temporarily correct its malfunctioning, the light becomes, like the sound of the train whistle in *A Man's Castle,* an intangible force that cannot be dealt with physically: later that night the light flickers again and finally goes out, trapping Jessie in the darkness. Light is part of a physical environment (Hester St) that she is trying to escape: Borzage treats it as a visual metaphor of her spiritual state and of the spiritual atmosphere which surrounds her.

In a way, Borzage's visual style reflects his belief in the immateriality of objects and characters. His images have little to do with real things; rather, like Plato's ideal forms, they refer to an absolute and eternal reality that exists on a purely abstract level. In other words, his images often function as metaphors, revealing his concern for larger, transcendent issues. In *Strange Cargo* (1940), Cambreau, who exerts a strange spiritual influence in the film, draws a map of an escape route from the island's prison in a Bible and leaves it behind for Vern to use when he escapes and follows him and the other prisoners. Though Borzage only cuts to the Bible map once, the image becomes one of the most powerful ones in the film, representing, as it does, the symbolic implications of the prisoners' escape/journey. The explicitness of this brief image, consistent with the explicitness of the film as a whole, illustrates the depth of Borzage's commitment to the metaphorical aspects of his story.

In *The River* (1928) Borzage presents Rosalee, waiting for the return of her convict-lover Marsdon, sitting disconsolately on the river's edge with the crow that Marsdon left her. Borzage intercuts shots of flotsam and debris, caught in the river's current, which disappears into a whirlpool. Reflecting her mood and state of mind, the river and its contents become a metaphor for Rosalee's despair. The appearance of Allen John among the drifting wreckage, since it initially suggests an identification of him with her gloom, ties the two together into a single state of consciousness which, through Allen John's purity and his subsequent efforts to evoke emotion in Rosalee, gradually evolves into a positive, therapeutic relationship that redeems Rosalee from her despondency.

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In visual terms, Borzage's backgrounds, like his tonal environments, have a spiritual rather than material quality. In most of his films, he uses studio sets and, as a result, his backgrounds have an unreal, fairy-tale quality. Part of this has to do with the way Borzage lights them — the tones of his backgrounds, often as light as or lighter than his characters' faces, give his frames a weightless quality. Borzage's lighting, like Griffith's, is even throughout the frame, i.e. each part of the frame seems equally and evenly lit. Yet Borzage's lighting is softer than Griffith's and his frames lack Griffith's precision and tremendous resolution in depth. What is important about Borzage's lighting is that it creates an *evenness* of tone within the frame: though the background and foreground are weightless, they are equally weightless. As a result of this evenness specific objects or backgrounds never exert specific physical force on his characters. The stove in *A Man's Castle* and the mirror-dresser in *Little Man, What Now?,* for example, have a force over Borzage's characters which goes beyond their material existence or function. The relationship of characters to objects or to their backgrounds, because of this evenness of tone do not work out in spatial terms (e.g. conflict between foreground and background or between characters and their environment). The flatness of Borzage's backgrounds and their tendency to fall out of focus in medium shot and close-up do not, as they do in, say, Cukors' films, separate characters by dividing the frame into two planes of depth. Instead, Borzage's lighting unifies his frames into a single level of depth, and characters do not derive their spirituality from specific objects or from specific parts of the frame (as in Griffith) but from the tonal quality of the whole frame and the succession of frames around it (i.e. from the editing).

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Unlike Hawks, Borzage is not a visual materialist. At the beginning of *Three Comrades,* after the toast to the 'comrades living and dead of all men', Borzage introduces his central characters. When one of them, Otto Koster, learns that, because of the armistice, his plane is to be dismantled, he leaves the group and goes outside. Outside, Borzage tracks in on Koster as he approaches his plane. He cuts to an insert shot of a medallion with 'Baby' written on it, cuts back to the original set-up as Koster takes the pin out of a grenade, drops it into the plane's cockpit and walks away. Then Borzage cuts back to a shot which tracks away from the plane and from Koster. The camera tracks back until the grenade explodes; then it tracks in again on the burning plane.

What makes the scene so emphatic is that its force hinges on the tracking camera which pulls away from the plane. For me, the tracking shot seems to deny the plane's physical reality, because although Koster destroys his airplane, it's clear that whatever 'Baby' is will live on after the demise of its physical reality. In fact, we later see an insert shot of the same medallion on Koster's car which he also sacrifices to achieve a spiritual goal — to pay for the operation of his friend's wife. The scene epitomizes the whole film: characters give objects and one another, through friendship and love,

Nevermore... Rosalee and the coin in The River

a life of their own which transcends material existence. Both objects and characters attain an 'eternal' reality — something impervious to time and space, to death or physical separation.

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There's a sequence in *A Man's Castle* in which Bill, afraid of becoming trapped by Trina's love, leaves her. The scene begins with a two-shot close-up of them together. Bill slowly draws out of the frame, leaving Trina alone on the bed. A train whistle is heard on the soundtrack. After a few moments, Borzage cuts to Bill hopping a freight. Then he begins to cross-cut — back to Trina, then to Bill. The shots of Trina are tremendously powerful — partly because of her angled position in the frame, as if her image were drawing him back through space. Bill first looks back and then jumps off the train to return to her. The cross-cuts here, somewhat like Griffith's in *Intolerance* or *Way Down East,* go beyond the mere mechanic of suspense: implying an ultimate rescue, they have the force of salvation and exert a mysterious power.

In Borzage's films, as suggested above, the space between characters — even in a single frame — has no deterministic force. Where Welles, in the famous breakfast-table time montage in *Citizen Kane,* or the stairway sequences in *The Magnificent Ambersons,* shows the separation of his characters in geographically physical terms — in fact, the space between characters becomes a character itself — Borzage has an altogether non-physical conception of time and space. The split-screen phone conversations in *Three Comrades* reflect this: a character in one spatial matrix can communicate with another in another spatial matrix. The use of the split-screen foreshadows a sort of relationship, like that in *A Man's Castle* or *I've Always Loved You,* that can transcend space. For this reason, the physical separation of the lovers throughout *Three Comrades* is immensely important to the development of the spirituality of their relationship. Like Koster's plane, it can be seen as another physical reality that Borzage's visual style destroys and transcends. As a result. the dissolve from Pat and the Christmas tree in the mountain sanatorium to Erich and the Christmas tree in Alphons' cafe, like that from Mrs Dexter's radio to Dean Harcourt's church in *Green Light,* transcends space by suggesting a far greater, spiritual reality that overshadows and encompasses every action in Borzage's universe.

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The shooting of *Three Comrades,* like that of Borzage's other '30s work has a strange, almost mysterious quality to it, as if he were trying to capture in his images the intangible forces that surround his characters. One sequence in particular — the time montage that announces the changing of the seasons — illustrates how far he is prepared to go in his 'romanticised' view of the universe. Midway through the film, Borzage cuts to shots of the wind blowing through the trees and through the city streets when winter comes. He transforms time into an almost mystical force that floats his cork-like characters along, much as the unseen wind does the newspaper in the streets. At times, his shooting seems to epitomise the emotional state of his characters at specific moments in time. On Erich and Pat's honeymoon, Borzage's long, high-angle shot of Erich carrying Pat along the shore back to their hotel after her sudden collapse seems to transform them, to bring out their inward state and feelings and project them upon the landscape.

At the end of *Three Comrades,* almost every shot serves to capture this essence. The breathtakingly beautiful crane-shot as Pat gets up out of bed after her operation and goes to her balcony to see Erich and Koster for the last time suggests, as does the overhead shooting at the end of *Seventh Heaven* and *Till We Meet Again,* a supernatural presence which oversees her ultimate transcendence of the final physical barrier which separates her from Erich: her body.

Borzage's ending of *Three Comrades,* which differs from Fitzgerald's (his screenwriter), takes place in a cemetery outside of the city and shows the three comrades and Pat reunited — a realisation of the film's first lines that toasted 'the comrades living and dead of all men'. In the last shot, Erich and Koster (surrounded by the ethereal images of Pat and Gottfried) leave the cemetery and talk of going to South America.[6] Like the characters at the end of *A Man's Castle* escaping on the train together or of *Little Man What Now?* with the prospect of a better life in Holland, the characters in *Three Comrades* do not run away from their chaotic, troubled backgrounds as much as they grow out of them spiritually. Borzage so totally transforms them that it becomes impossible for them to go back, as Fitzgerald wanted. Erich and Koster, like Pat and Gottfried, are ultimately liberated from the weight of their own bodies and chaotic backgrounds that threaten to entrap them.

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In conclusion, what makes Borzage's melodramas unique is the director's avoidance of extreme conflicts: neither his characters nor their environment struggle mortally with one another. Rather than externalising his plots into moral contests between good and evil in which characters defeat or are defeated by the evil that engulfs them, Borzage, diffusing the conventional melodramatic moral polarity, permits the co-existence of several moral and spiritual systems in his films. He merely makes trial of one by juxtaposing it to another, providing the catalyst for his characters' growth out of one system and emergence into another, more transcendent one. The tolerated presence of inferior spiritual systems in his films only heightens the beauty and integrity of the superior one. For Borzage, it is only through love and adversity that souls are made great.

John Belton

1 Corrigan, Robert W., ed., *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century,* New York, Dell Publishing Co., 1967, pp. 7–8.

2 Milne, Peter, *Motion Picture Directing,* 'Some Words From Frank Bcrzage', New York, Falk Publishing Co., 1922.

3 The insanity of the Nazis is suggested most vividly in their secret meetings and in the terrifying book-burning sequence outside the professor's university window.

4 The film's success upon its release in 1940 rests largely on its political importance as one of the first anti-Nazi Hollywood films. Most contemporary reviews discuss it only on those terms. The author of the book on which the film was based even wrote a political analysis of the film for *The New York Times* (6/16/40).

5 Indeed, Borzage makes very little of Roth's Jewishness. His specific religion is less important than his overall spiritual outlook.

6 In *Crazy Sundays,* Aaron Latham anecdotally discusses F. Scott Fitzgerald's contribution to the film's present ending as escapism. The idea which Fitzgerald wanted to close with was that of 'the march of four people living and dead, heroic and inconquerable, side by side back into the fight'. *Crazy Sundays,* The Viking Press, New York, 1970, pp. 144–145.

...but from the débris and flotsam emerges Allen John

Seventh Heaven

Seventh Heaven USA 1927 **Dir** Frank Borzage **Sc** Benjamin Glazer, based on the play by Austin Strong and John Golden **Phot** Ernest Palmer **Cast** Janet Gaynor (Diane) Charles Farrell (Chico) Ben Bard (Colonel Brissac) Emile Chautard (Father Chevillon) **Prod** Fox

It has been claimed that melodrama is characteristic of an alienated society which is unaware of class struggles. In *Seventh Heaven* Chico (Charles Farrell) is certainly alienated, but his strong sense of, and respect for, social structures is described in terms which imply that society is not as well organised as he thinks. He works in the sewers of Paris and hopes literally to move up in the world (*ie* above ground) and become a street sweeper. Besides, the setting of the film transcends the architecture of society, since Chico lives in an attic, a 'seventh heaven' from which he can dominate Paris and where he will find love with Diane.

At the beginning of the film Diane (Janet Gaynor) and her sister receive the visit of very wealthy relatives who refuse to help the girls when they understand that they are semi-prostitutes. The scene does not appear in the 1937 remake (by Henry King), which profoundly modifies the social implications of the story. For the relatives are accompanied by a certain Colonel Brissac (Ben Bard) who turns up again later when, during the war, Chico is at the front and Diane working in a munitions factory. It appears that Brissac, safely posted in Paris, tries to seduce Diane, urging her not to care about 'the old rules', that is to say, loyalty. Such social comment is not uncommon in Borzage's work, and in a later film of his (*Moonrise,* 1948), society will stand accused for having assumed that a murderer's son was himself a murderer, thereby making him into one.

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Religion plays an explicit part in *Seventh Heaven* as in a number of Borzage's films, for instance *Disputed Passage* (1939), *Strange Cargo* (1940), *The Big Fisherman* (1959). At first Chico prides himself on being an atheist. He begins to be gradually converted when the priest (Emile Chautard, of Sternberg fame) shows him that God pays his debts after all, and promotes him to street sweeper. Being suddenly called up (the time is 1914), there is no time for a church wedding, and he accepts to be married to Diane symbolically by exchanging religious medals. At the front he dies in the same priest's arms and asks him to return his medal to Diane. The end of the film is a succession of sudden reversals. First, when Diane hears that Chico has died, she professes not to believe in God any more. Then, miraculously Chico appears; he had not been killed, it seems, but only blinded, and now that he is blind, he can see the truth and believes in God. Both these sudden reversals and the ambiguous character of the ending as a whole serve to underline the important role of religion in the film, but at the same time its limits.

Chico and Diane marry without the intervention of the established Church, and throughout the war they remain in telepathic contact. Every day at 11am they exchange the formula 'Chico–Diane–Heaven'. Ultimately, the direct communication between two individuals, with only an indirect reference to religion, is seen as more important than any overtly religious bond. Their Heaven is of their own making rather than one opened to them by Divine Providence. (Again, in the remake, the attitude towards religion is more conventional, which is one of the reasons why King's film paradoxically looks more dated than Borzage's.)

The two sisters

Common sense generally regards the letter (the symbol) less important than the spirit (the substance). The letter is seen as an impoverishment of the spirit. In melodrama, this relationship is of a more fundamental nature. The letter is an intimation of the spirit, and the original unity of letter and spirit is reinstated. To enact the words and gestures of a ritual, to achieve what is normally derided as 'make-believe' or 'symbolic gratification', in melodrama often comes to express the spirit better than the conventional 'real thing'. The phenomenon might be described as evoking 'the spirit of the letter' through 'the letter of the spirit'. In *Seventh Heaven,* Chico rescues Diane first from her sister and then from herself (she tries to commit suicide). But the sister wants to take revenge by making sure that Diane is rounded up by the police. Chico steps forward and states categorically: 'She's my wife'. Because he has said so, the words (the letter) will become true (the spirit), they are already true even though he himself is unaware of this. Melodramatic characters often express similarly binding oracles. Chico and Diane have to live together for a few days because of the police's threat to check on them. This is the occasion for their having breakfast together, another indication that they are man and wife according to the 'spirit' because they are already man and wife according to a ritualistic 'letter'. (Cf. similar scenes in Capra's *It Happened One Night* or in Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives.*) When they actually marry each other with Chico's medals, Diane prays 'that this be a true marriage'. Going through the letter of the ritual ensures that the spirit is also present. In Wellman's *Lafayette Escadrille,* Tab Hunter and Etchika Choureau marry in a comparable way, by using the girl's earrings as a pledge.

A consequence of the relation between the letter and the spirit is that inanimate objects can play as important a function in melodrama as they do in fairy tales. Contrary to appearances, when such an inanimate object has a human being's name, it is also endowed with a soul. Thus in *Seventh Heaven* we witness the heroic death of Eloise (a taxicab) at the Battle of the Marne. In *Moonrise* Rex Ingram does not distinguish between human beings, 'Mr Dog' and 'Mr Guitar'.

These remarks bear on the ending as well, because it becomes clear that, when the characters refer to 'Heaven', this is meant in more than one sense. In other words, what in Borzage's melodramas appears to be symbolic may well be true, what appears to be real may well be symbolic. 'Heaven' is a figure of speech, but also a hereafter, whilst at the same time the Parisian attic which the phrase seems to designate is more an imaginary projection than a 'real' setting. Or, to put it in very stark terms, the symbol is true, whereas realism is 'only' symbolic.

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After years of war we see Chico in a trench, wounded by flame-throwers. Because he cannot read his watch, he is unable to keep his daily telepathic date with Diane at 11am. We then see him die in the priest's arms. Diane's sorrow when she hears the news is set in sharp contrast with the rejoicing of Armistice Day. A traditional motif, the exuberant joy of a crowd is used as a foil for individual tragedy (*cf* the fun fair in Minnelli's *Some Came Running* or again in Borzage's *Moonrise*). When Chico suddenly appears, blind but alive, making his way through the crowd, walking up the spiral staircase to his 'Seventh Heaven' and arriving in the attic at 11am, he states very forcibly: 'I'll *never* die' and *'Nothing*

can keep Chico blind for long'. At the end of the film, supernatural sunshine suffuses the attic and achieves a transfiguration of the picturesque setting. Thus the impression is of Death and Transfiguration. After all, Chico has actually died before our very eyes, it is not as if there had been an ellipsis in the narrative (which is the case in the remake). Also, his claims are so exaggerated (never, nothing) that the effect is one of truth on a symbolic level, not on a realistic level. What can be argued is that such a symbolic level is also the realm of religion, that their Heaven has become the Christian Paradise. Yet this is not completely convincing, because, as already pointed out, the characters have previously expressed attitudes, and behaved in a way that revealed a certain diffidence towards established forms of religion. If we accept the idea that the happy ending is symbolic rather than realistic, we are then left with the reality of Chico's death and with Diane's faith consequently shattered.

Thus the ending of *Seventh Heaven* does not conflict with the sense of tragedy which is so apparent in other Borzage films. (See the death of children in *Secrets, No Greater Glory, Magnificent Doll;* the hanging scenes of *Secrets* and *Moonrise; etc*). Rather, it is another example of the recourse to the dream world of a personal hereafter.

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What remains to be discussed is why the film is so effective, how its themes and structures are actually expressed by the stylistic devices of acting, lighting, setting, etc. For example, the opening scenes introduce the viewer to Paris in 1914, with the realistic picturesque touches of a gaslight or of customers playing dominoes in a café. Particularly moving is the idyll between Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell, which takes place in the Seventh Heaven of the title. From their window, they can see both Sacré-Coeur and the Eiffel Tower, as well as the stars. The attic at once expresses Chico's (symbolic/real) elevation above his social condition and it proves a means of redemption for Diane. Conventional syntax is inverted as we watch the characters actually fall in love after they have gone through the everyday gestures of living together, rather than the other way round, as in the case of a ready-made romance or honeymoon. Borzage's eroticism is discreet, but effective, as one sees Janet Gaynor undress and show her naked legs. At first, this might seem surprising, considering the date of the film, but similarly frank eroticism is to be found in Borzage's *The River* (1928) or in De Mille's *The Squawman* (1931). On the other hand, by 1937 it was no longer deemed possible to be so open about sexual charm.

When Chico and Diane are reunited, he being blind and still wearing his uniform, Diane's dress as she embraces him is so white that they look like one of those turn-of-the-century statues where a knight in armour clasps a seemingly naked woman. Throughout the film, lighting is used to idealise Janet Gaynor, the light is reflected on her hair and surrounds her face with a supernatural halo, just as in *Secrets* Mary Pickford's face is surrounded by sacred flames when she loses her child.

Borzage's attention to apparently unimportant details has been noted by fellow-director Jean Negulesco in the following, rather uncomprehending, terms: 'Borzage was a strange man. He'd have a scene with, say, three hundred extras, and all he'd be interested in was the way water would drip from a leaf and the way you'd see Gary Cooper passing by through this dripping water in the big retreat from Caporetto.'* In *Seventh Heaven* the realistic detail of Chico's long belt is turned to lyrical effect when he spins on himself very quickly to put it on, and the movement ends with his 'accidentally' embracing Diane. Later Diane is mending his jacket while he is at work, and Borzage shows her tentatively putting the jacket's sleeves around herself, a motif also used by Busby Berkeley in the ballet of the washerwomen, and in Minnelli's early musical *Cabin in the Sky.* (This of course provides another example of the magic character of 'inanimate' objects.)

Charles Farell

Janet Gaynor

Other visual inventions include the reenactment of the German advance on Paris in the fall of 1914: a soldier uses a sausage to designate the German army and lumps of sugar for the French positions. The war scenes that follow (the Battle of the Marne) are remarkable for their portrayal of the taxicabs and of the battle itself, with a scene shot from behind a glass pane. They are developed in a way that makes the melodrama carry one into the war setting visually as well as in terms of plot and situation. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that Borzage is also the director of *A Farewell to Arms* and of *No Greater Glory.* (In particular, a scene from *Seventh Heaven,* with children hailing the soldiers who leave for the front, points forward to the latter film.)

Throughout the film, which has no dialogue but background music and choirs off, programmatic music is used to express the conflict between the historical theme (military marches, la Marseillaise, la Madelon . . .) and the individual love theme ('Diane'). The theme song became very popular, and Charles Farrell and Janet Gaynor were to star together in several musicals, mostly under David Butler's direction. Such use of music is very characteristic of both melodrama in general and of Borzage films. In an operatic way, a theme signifies the characters' plight. The lifelong love affair of Mary Pickford and Leslie Howard in *Secrets* is expressed by the song 'O Susanna' which transcends the march of time (it is heard as they travel in a wagon at the beginning of their marriage and again as they leave by car at the end of their life). In *Mannequin,* the song which at first is the emblem of Joan Crawford's love for Alan Curtis becomes, unchanged, the emblem of her romance with Spencer Tracy. *Moonrise* is also the name of a song, and Rex Ingram plays a song on the guitar to warn the hero of his tragic fate.

In 1927 — the year of Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* — Janet Gaynor also starred in Murnau's *Sunrise,* and (again with Charles Farrell) in Borzage's *Street Angel.* Both players were reunited under Borzage's direction in *Lucky Star* (1929); Charles Farrell appeared without Janet Gaynor in *The River* (1928) and *Liliom* (1930), both by Borzage. The remake of *Seventh Heaven* is incidentally above much of King's work, probably due in large measure to the original, but credit should also be given to its interpreters, James Stewart and Simone Simon, and to a strong supporting cast, which make it not altogether unworthy of Borzage's romantic achievement.

Jean-Loup Bourget

* See Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, *The Celluloid Muse* (Hollywood Directors Speak). Angus and Robertson, London, 1969.

Klute

Klute USA 1971 **Dir** and **Pr** Alan Pakula **Sc** Andy K and Dave Lewis **Phot** Gordon Willis **Mus** Michael Small **Cast** Jane Fonda (Bree Daniels) Donald Sutherland (John Klute) Charles Cioffi (Cable) Roy Schneider (Frank Ligourin) **Prod** Warner (114 min)

Donald Sutherland: an unlikely Orpheus . . .

Pakula has come to be a director after twenty years or so in the film industry, and to judge from *Klute* the long delay looks like a source of strength, for he pursues his particular psychological interest (significantly he once wanted to train as a psycho-analyst) within an established genre framework, and in so doing achieves a masterly reworking, and revitalization, of the 'private eye' thriller. John Klute, like his Hammett and Chandler forbears, completes his assignment, solves the crime and gets the girl: but where the detective is a short-haired, clean-living provincial confronting the sin and glitter of New York, where his employer is the criminal to be unmasked, and where the girl is both victim and exploiter in an atomized urban society, a prostitute addicted to role-playing as an escape from feeling, the assignment soon reveals itself to be a quest for the truth of something more than a particular 'missing persons' case. Descending into the lower depths of the great city, Pakula's detective journeys towards the heart of a darkness both psychological and social, the darkness of a civilization that knows only extremes, that offers only brutal alternatives — opulence or squalor, repression or indulgence, oppression or prostitution. In this world of unmediated opposites Klute moves as a mediator, suggesting, however tentatively, the existence of other possibilities, other ways of living, and performing in the end an act of human salvage, if not salvation.

The film opens with an image of plenitude and contentment — a dinner-party in a prosperous middle-class home, with a glimpse of garden through the window indicating rural, or at least suburban, peace. Cut to an image of absence and distress — the empty chair at the head of the table, the table bare and the guests departed. The onetime host, Grunneman, is missing, suspected of being a psychopath who relieves his sadistic impulses on New York prostitutes. John Klute, a friend of the family, volunteers to look for him with the backing of Cable, the managing director of Grunneman's firm. But the search for the missing man becomes a search for his murderer, the psychopath; and this, in turn, involves the rescue and regeneration of his one surviving victim, the prostitute Bree Daniels. The film turns in a circle; the murderer is identical with the man who instigated the inquiry, Cable, while Grunneman's empty chair of the opening sequence is echoed in the final shot of Bree's empty room as she is about to leave with Klute. One image of emptiness calls forth another, but the emotional and moral significance is reversed: the loss of Grunneman is the saving of Bree; the emptiness that spells death in the pastoral world, bears the promise of new life in an urban world where abundance is synonymous with chaos.

This combination of parallel and contrast is a fundamental feature of the film and provides a key to the nature of Pakula's vision. The orderly bareness of Klute's basement hide-out is mirrored in the aseptic order of Cable's skyscraper office, his impassive countenance in Cable's; his descent from the roof of Bree's apartment to the cellar in pursuit of the prowling psychopath foreshadows Cable's plunging glance from his Manhattan eyrie and his final fall. Similarly, the acting and modelling for which Bree auditions without success are presented as parallels to her actual profession, simply different forms of prostitution. And yet there is still a marked contrast in moral terms between Klute's life and Cable's, between the act Bree puts on as a call-girl and her attempt to act the part of St Joan. Pakula's parallels are not the simple equations of a pessimism, or cynicism, that sees all human actions as indistinguishably corrupt. The parallels between Klute and Cable do more than merely suggest that all men are brothers in depravity; they are made to emphasize the different moral options open to men exposed to the same conditions. The vertical plane in which Pakula's camera repeatedly moves — following the upward or downward movement of a lift, tracing the soaring flight of a helicopter, craning down into the sombre canyons of Manhattan — indicates the moral scale on which the lives of his characters are plotted: they may rise or they may fall, there is hope as well as despair, the likelihood of damnation is countered by the possibility of salvation.

The emphasis on vertical movement and rhythm of rise and fall hint at a mythical dimension to Klute's assignment. His is a journey from the secular paradise of a peaceful rural world into the hell of the modern metropolis. He descends into his underworld to find not monsters but simply people, like the quiet pot-smoking party he stumbles on in the cellar beneath Bree's apartment when he thinks he is homing in on the psychopath. An inferno the city may be, but there is no autonomous force of evil here, only different forms of human life and suffering; and in coming to appreciate this, the detective, it is suggested, undergoes an education in human sympathy.

At first Klute, the provincial and probably puritan *ingénu,* remains resolutely unimpressed by the apparent glamour of New York, his impassive face serving as a blank screen on which are projected the sad perversions, strident temptations and wryly comic absurdities of commercialized sex. But hard-faced detachment is only another variation of the common sickness, the common emotional paralysis, and if Klute does prove to be something of a hero, then his heroism consists not so much in the traditional cool and muscular resilience of the private-eye as in the capacity for feeling that he gradually comes to reveal. His seduction by the prostitute Bree is perhaps the first crucial stage in this process, putting an end to his outsider's contempt for the life of the city and 'corrupting' him into the stream of common humanity. The positive moral significance of an event which is, in the first place, simply a snub to his superiority meted out with the skill of a professional, emerges clearly, and perhaps too clearly, from the subsequent scene in the street-market. Here Klute's cool detachment has yielded to natural warmth, and he becomes the smiling accomplice to Bree's petty theft of a forbidden fruit. The camera tracks back to show them in distant profile walking home, Klute playing Orpheus to Bree's Eurydice, leading the way as she follows trustingly behind holding on to his jacket. Then he turns to look at her, puts his arm around her and they continue together. The puritan moralist has yielded to the old, but human, Adam; and this is his, and the girl's salvation. This tight-lipped Orpheus is only finally able to lead his Eurydice out of the metropolitan Hades because he does turn his head from the strict line of assigned duty, because he proves to be more of a man than a machine.

There are other points at which Klute's capacity for feeling can be seen to unfold, points through which one can plot the curve of his inner development (Pakula is not concerned with showing that curve in detail since Bree's inner pilgrimage is the main focus of the narrative). When he comes to walk among the lowest of the dead, the heroin addicts of the lower East Side, he is moved at least enough by one man's grief at the death of his girl to give him money for a fix. Once again, to show simple decency is to collude in some way with corruption; and when Klute later meets Cable at the helicopter station, knowing by now for certain that he is the killer, there is a similar sense of identification with fallen humanity. As the helicopter takes off with Cable's face staring down darkly from inside, Klute stands faced by his own reflection in a window. In Cable he has seen his own potential self; in unmasking Cable he has attained a new degree of self-understanding. And this laconic image of sympathy rather than revulsion marks the climax of Klute's investigation.

In spite of the title, however, the girl rather than the detective is the focal point of the film, her condition and her trade being most fully indicative of the nature of life and the nature of relationships in this particular social environment. She lives alone, preying on the desires and weaknesses of others, and being preyed upon in her turn. The room she lives in is a central image of isolation, combining with similar images — Klute's basement, Cable's eyrie, recurrent shots of lift-cages — to suggest a world composed of separate and untouching atoms of human existence. The room, like her emotional isolation, is both womb and prison, refuge and trap; it represents privacy but also loneliness; it is the place she retreats to after her sexual forays into the world for money, but it is also the place where she can be hunted down by the nocturnal prowler on the roof and the silent caller. The ambivalent nature of the room is reflected in the function of the telephone (and the same applies to the tape-recorder which portentuously accompanies the credits). In this atomized world technology replaces the missing human bonds between people, and the telephone assumes crucial importance as a life-line on the one hand, and as an instrument of violation on the other. It is Bree's principal means of contact with the outside world, the means by which her clients can reach her, but at the same time the means by which she can be threatened and her privacy violated. It marks both her isolation and the whole web of warped relationships in which she is entangled: she can use the phone to manipulate others or she can be manipulated by it, and between these extremes there seems to lie no other possibility, until Klute arrives to suggest, at least potentially, a relationship in which neither manipulation nor technology has a necessary place.

Klute's intrusion is, of course, another form of violation, but like her seduction of him, its consequences are salutary, since it finally breaks the circle of prostitution and exploitation and restores to the girl her power of feeling, her ability to love. More than anything else the film is the story of that restoration, the case-history of a person suffering from a form of psychological and emotional sclerosis that eventually responds to the shock treatment of human contact. A confessional thread runs through the sequence of dramatic events: at frequent intervals Bree is shown, or heard, describing her condition to an analyst and commenting on her changing feelings for Klute as she is gradually weaned away from the prostitution that had become a compulsive means of achieving temporary identity and security through skillfully playing a role, through the actress' suspension of feeling. Watching Bree's confession or her role-playing, we, the audience, feel ourselves placed in the position of a voyeur; there is a clear sense of eavesdropping, or key-hole spying, as we witness the patient confiding to the analyst or the call-girl at intimate work with a client. Like Klute we are outside observers, made to feel our distance from these scenes of private life. But as the narrative proceeds the confessional element is subordinated to the dramatic, the case-history comes alive, and the observer's distance yields to palpable involvement, parallelling Bree's own development. The climax of our involvement, and hers, is her confrontation with Cable in the garment-manufacturers' deserted office where the full destructive effect of her exploitation of men's weaknesses is finally revealed. In preying upon the dark corners of Cable's psyche, she has helped turn him into a murderer, and the realization of this comes upon her with the force of the knowledge that she is to be his next victim — while we suffer sympathetically with suspense. As she is forced to listen to a recording of Cable's preceding murder, the hard-bitten facade of the cool actress flakes away in tears. Whether the tears stem from self-pity or remorse is immaterial; the fact that they flow at all is enough to herald her rebirth. The tape-recorder has played its final role of violation, this time to a positive end.

. . . to Jane Fonda's Eurydice

The room is not only an image of atomized existence, it also functions as a barometer of Bree's inner development: on it and through it are projected the strains and the crises of her psychological regeneration. If any evidence were needed of the cinema's affinity to the nineteenth-century realistic novel, then little could be more telling than the way in which character and milieu are here so closely related that the tidiness or untidiness of a room can express the calm or confusion of a human soul. Klute's gradual intrusion into the girl's life is marked by a growing orderliness in the room in which she lives. When it is ransacked by the unknown psychopath, we are made aware of the turmoil in her life and mind, caused not only by her persecutor but also by Klute himself: the order that he brings does violence to her habitual way of life. It is amid the debris of her apartment, the tokens of confusion, that he finds her about to go off with her former pimp, with the intention of returning, it seems, to her old life. When we finally return to the room after the dénouement and Cable's death, it is empty, swept bare of confusion and the debris of the old life, and eloquent of a new peace of mind and a new beginning as she prepares to leave with Klute for the country.

Outlined thus, it might seem to be a sentimental and evasive conclusion, the facile triumph of love in conditions in which one could confidently expect the noblest feelings to be corrupted. But Pakula keeps the tone of that final scene cool, non-committal, even ironic. Bree's salvation is tentative and qualified by her own admission that she might be back in New York next week, while knight-errant Klute takes his final bow carrying, amongst other pieces of luggage, a caged cat. And if their last exit is certainly a flight from the city, it is not necessarily a flight from reality. The world is all before them; and it is perhaps not the least of Pakula's qualities that he is able to leave us with this open ending, that he is capable of exploring the twilight zones of society and the human psyche without succumbing to the easy temptations of black romanticism or cultural pessimism.

John Rignall

The Last Picture Show

The Last Picture Show USA 1971 **Dir** Peter Bogdanovich **Pr** S J Friedman **Sc** Larry McMurray and P B **Phot** Robert Surtees **Ed** Donn Cambern **Cast** Timothy Bottoms (Sonny) Jeff Bridges (Duane) Cybill Shepherd (Jacey) Ben Johnson (Sam the Lion) Cloris Leachman (Ruth Popper) **Prod** BBS for Columbia (118 min)

In a celebrated review of *Bicycle Thieves,* Bazin speaks of it as the end of cinema: nowadays, fortified by Lukacs's distinction between the epic and the novel, one would perhaps speak of the end of the cinema's *innocence.* No longer sustained by its initial impetus, the art-form turns reflexive, hesitates over itself, sees itself as *problematic.*

In Europe a sizeable body of cineastes welcomed the change with open arms. But what for some is a liberation is for others a signal for entrenchment. In Hollywood at all events the decline, seen at first hand, of a great tradition elicits a certain nostalgia that is perhaps unhealthy for new talents: in this context we can situate *The Last Picture Show,* Peter Bogdanovich's second feature film. Bogdanovich in his role as critic is obviously aware of the cinema's loss of innocence — is not the closing of the 'Royale', the picture house of the film's title, with a screening of *Red River* explicitly intended as a metaphor for this 'coming of age'? For Bogdanovich, however, the coming of age *can only be regretted*: with nothing new to look forward to, he proceeds to embalm the past. If the future shows only an empty page, the past can at least be imitated. Like the poet or novelist who looks back wistfully to a lost golden age, Bogdanovich tirelessly contemplates the work of the *old masters*.

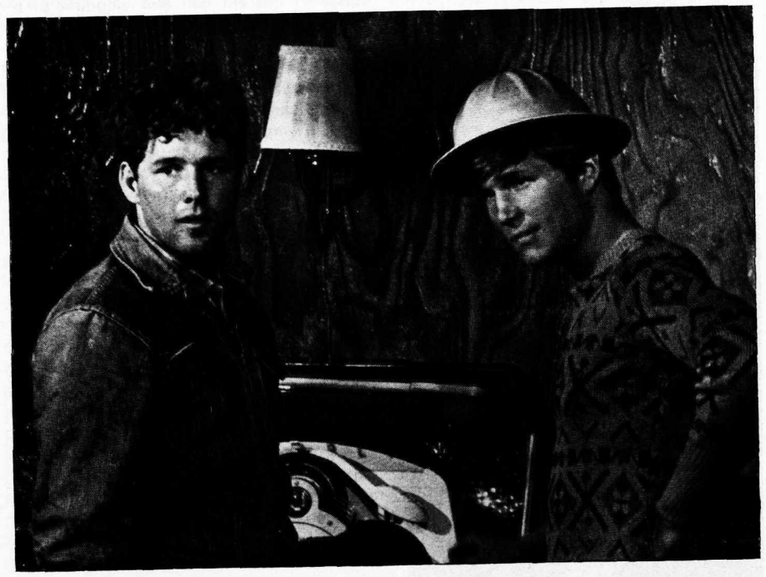
The question that arises is whether Bogdanovich in this film is capable of incorporating his awareness of Hollywood's past creatively into the fabric of his own vision. It is not true of course that Bogdanovich is *unaware* of the historical dimension. Quite the contrary: *The Last Picture Show* is reflexive in the sense that it is saturated with memories of the cinema. It is a film about the cinema rather than about almost anything else. The aim is not, certainly, to produce a 'realistic' portrait of small town America in 1951. Bogdanovich realises that the cinema is not, in Godard's dictum, the reflection of reality, but rather, the reality of a reflection: this paradox asserts among other things the overriding importance respected, indeed exploited, by Bogdanovich, of an audience's expectation of the *medium,* their awareness of the manipulations of an already established genre. Bogdanovich's aim, then, in *The Last Picture Show* is to create, with the audience's complicity, the timeless American film, a film to stand for all Hollywood films ever made in the 40's and 50's, an ur-movie.

An ambitious task: unfortunately, the seams of this composite picture are only too visible. If the very best melodramas of the 50's have an undeniable dramatic force, it is because they are simultaneously 'cool', because in an important sense they are underplayed: there is a certain toughness in them that gives their poignancy resonance. With Bogdanovich, on the contrary, the attempt to encompass everything leads to emotional inflation. Much of the trouble lies in his lack of critical distance. The successful artist uses the genre only to transform it: there are times in *The Last Picture Show* when we feel that Bogdanovich uses the genre not so much to transform it as to ape it. One would be happier if the film showed signs of creative parody. But parody is precisely what *The Last Picture Show* is not. It is in short an imitation and runs the risk, as all imitations do, of being called a fake. Perhaps most serious of all, Bogdanovich is confused, about which genre he is imitating in the first place.

One might speak then of the film as a confection; I use the word to convey a certain artificiality in his portrayal of Anarene, for there is an obvious sense in which Bogdanovich feels that in getting the trappings right (decor, clothes, street settings) authenticity will be guaranteed. In other words, backed up by a good art director and a cameraman who knows how to imitate the grains and texture of a 50's feature, he cannot go wrong. There seems to be a general failure to go beyond the mere 'thingness' of his objects in order to investigate their connotations, their difference, their fullness. The objects become fetishes whose period accuracy is in the end all that counts: Duane's Mercury is a case in point, standing gleaming like an advertisement from the National Geographic magazine; this is also true to a lesser extent of the cars of Jacy and her mother. The date on the classroom blackboard reminds us that we are witnessing events that take place in February 1951. Adlai Stevenson's presidential nomination is overheard on the television. On Jacy's bed period magazines are tastefully arranged. When Ruth and Sonny first sleep together the sequence also opens with a close-up of three magazines lying on a 'fifties style sideboard. Even the refrigerator and the Dr Pepper's coke in Ruth's kitchen acquire the same overtones. Similarly, Bogdanovich's use of music is suspect — the insistant country and western songs draw attention to themselves in too demanding a way, as guarantee of period atmosphere. (It's interesting to see that country and western music is once more 'fashionable' and define the film as such, in the same ways as the soundtracks of *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* helped to 'sell' their product.)

In more general terms the film is itself of course an imitation of Ford, Hawks, Kazan: imitation, once more, rather than critique. The quotation from *Red River*, as well as pointing to a contrast between the myth and the reality of Texas, serves to remind us, as if that were necessary, that Bogdanovich sees himself as the heir to Hawks. But it's a quotation that has no sharpness, that rests entirely on the level of nostalgia. For Bogdanovich, an extract from *Red River* speaks for itself. We are entitled to ask for more. Peter Wollen has already pointed out (*7 Days,* March 22nd 1972) that *The Last Picture Show* aims at *bringing together* the Hawks theme of the all male group with Ford's vision of an organically inter-

Soul music for the hillbillies



related community. This is what I meant when I spoke of Bogdanovich's ambitiousness. For isn't the film also a sentimental education which aims to make its points through the consciousness of its hero Sonny Crawford? Now Ford's films tend to have no heroes and consequently the community can be investigated on all levels without the encumbrance of a mediating consciousness (Preminger's 'objective' stance is another case in point). While Hawks' films tend to investigate a given group, stressing their mutual interdependence, Bogdanovich attempts to run together at least three different and sometimes contradictory conceptions of mise-en-scene and this leads to disastrous consequences. For if the film is supposed to unfold through Sonny's eyes, what relevance have the sequences involving Jacy and her mother? Whose sentimental education is it?

It is meant, of course, to be Sonny's, whose mentor Sam the Lion acts as the repository of decency and the old conservative values Bogdanovich cherishes. And here it seems to me that precisely because the film is an *imitation*, it falls into the traps of cliché and sentimentality, for despite all Bogdanovich's prodding, Sam the Lion simply doesn't work: it's not a question of a lack of conviction on anyone's part, but rather the means Bogdanovich deploys to put over his message. The problem is one of mise-en-scène. In every scene in which Sam appears the camera lingers a shade too long, the dialogue becomes mawkish and trite. 'I'm just as sentimental as the next fellow when it comes to old times' he says to Sonny in the scene by the reservoir. There is a pause: 'Old times' he repeats; 'I brought a young lady here one time,' and he launches into a description of the 'craziness' of those old times. But if bathing nude and riding horses across the reservoir for a silver dollar with Jacy's mother are supposed to stand for poetry or authentic feelings, we are entitled to draw back and withold our assent from Lois's proposition that 'If it hadn't been for Sam, I'd just about have missed it I guess, whatever it was . . .' Whatever it was indeed! In the same manner Sonny's and Duane's trip to Mexico are an excuse for a seven second close up on Sam's face as he waves goodbye for the last time. The character of Billy in this respect relies heavily on cliché: armed with broomstick and cap he can be used to add pathos to any scene — Sam's funeral springs to mind, but also the picture house itself where on both occasions of a film being shown, the camera pans up to Billy on the projection stand happily and innocently watching the films Bogdanovich refuses to interrogate . . .

The position is the same elsewhere. The individual parts are milked for all they are worth; the emphasis is on big performances and it's not surprising that an American film establishment that sees the merit of films in terms of Oscars for everything else before direction should duly reward the actress who plays the Ruth Popper part. The definition in this case of a 'big performance' involves a stereotype that may well possess an odd ideological significance. The actress in question will be a mature woman caught up in a situation over which she has little control; she will be hard and cynical on the surface, but secretly full of feeling. The camera will frequently catch her holding back tears. Patricia Neal in *Hud* and Katherine Hepburn in *The Lion in Winter* are representative examples of this mode and it is interesting to see that in *The Last Picture Show* at least two more characters, the waitress Genevieve and Lois Farrow, Jacy's mother, also qualify for this treatment (three, if one counts Mrs Moulsey who can't run the movie house by herself after Sam's death). Against this insistence on 'psychological depth' and 'exploration of emotions' it is hardly necessary to place Godard's astringent use of characterization, indeed his refusal to go in for 'characterization' in the accepted sense at all. One might also mention the way in which certain Hollywood directors (Hitchcock for example) undercut our notions of characterization by employing actors against type, or, alternatively, by using lighting, montage and cutting as subverting factors, factors which contradict the characters' surface performance. For behind all this is the realisation, not apparently shared by Bogdanovich, that a certain type of acting has a certain ideological undertow; viz (in this case) a passive, bourgeois acceptance of things, characters delighting in their own tragic pathos, a falsely Chekovian stance of tragedy as consolation, summed up in a piece of representative dialogue: 'It could have been worse' — 'You can say that about almost anything', or Sam's 'You wouldn't believe how this country's changed', or Genevieve's 'Sure, I wish we'd made it'. Again, we are tempted to say that Billy's death is introduced merely as an excuse for the final tearful confrontation between Sonny and Ruth (being in any case mute, Billy can't complain of the injustice of this). In short, the tragedy is factitious precisely because the film sees itself *as* tragedy and the audience's expectations are agreeably gratified. Sonny 'makes it up' with Ruth; the camera lingers in close up on their clasped hands. Tears of anger change to tears of reconciliation. The audience is invited to identify with this response to Billy's death. One might mention at this point the fact that Billy's death brings out precisely this clench fisted, fighting-tears-back response in Sonny as he drags the body away from the group of cattle truck drivers, that I have diagnosed in the Ruth Popper character. The whole sequence is instructive in Bogdanovich's acceptance of cinematic cliché: from the portentous windblown and deserted streets of its opening shots, through the glimpse of Billy's broom lying on the road, followed by a rapid zoom in to close up, Sonny's cry of 'He was my friend,' the dragging of Billy's body to the steps, the covering of his face with Sonny's jacket, to the final close up of Billy's cap (another motif developed at length during the film), the scene is 'played' for all it is worth. To repeat, it is not a question of a lack of conviction, or even of a lack of taste or reticence. Simply, that as the scene stands, it is overwhelmingly *fabricated;* it is transparently a set piece of a type of acting both outdated and inauthentic whose end product is just such looseness of critical focus.

The Last Picture Show has had a fair amount of acclaim and this form of updated costume drama (Mulligan's *Summer of 42* and Malle's *Souffle au Coeur* also spring to mind) looks like supplying a popular need for nostalgia. All the more reason to remain sceptical: the cinema Bogdanovich so much admires. thrives on action and abrasiveness. His film. on the contrary, is soft in the centre and. in the last resort. marred by a fatal literalness.

Mark LeFanu

. . . Old Times . . . Sam the Lion and his admirers

All That Heaven Allows

All That Heaven Allows USA 1955 **Dir** Douglas Sirk **Pr** Ross Hunter **Sc** Peg Fenwick **Phot** Russell Metty **Art Dir** Alex Golitzer and Eric Orbom **Ed** Frank Gross **Cast** Jane Wyman (Cary Scott) Rock Hudson (Ron Kirby) Agnes Moorhead (Sara Warren) Conrad Nagel (Harvey) Jacqueline de Wit (Mona Plash) **Prod** Universal (89 min)

Until very recently, Douglas Sirk remained in a kind of critical limbo. In the last couple of years some valuable and novel material has appeared, covering many aspects of his work. The most important element so far left unstudied is Sirk's relationship to the melodrama, the genre he most used during both his German period (1935–37) in feature films, and in his second American period, at Universal (1950–58).

Two reasons, certainly, have contributed to the neglect of Sirk. One is an almost total ignorance about his cultural formation in Weimar Germany. The other is a repeated failure, even among those who have praised him, to take adequate account of the highly specific conditions of production surrounding his work.[1] Sirk is most definitely an *auteur,* but an *auteur* working in circumstances far from ideal, and rarely able to direct his own projects. And since *All that Heaven Allows* was not a project of his own choice, it is an exemplary object of study, since it focuses many of the problems in discussing Sirk's American work.

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After a difficult early period in America (1939–1948), during much of which he was under contract to Columbia, Sirk finally signed up with Universal in 1950, and stayed with this studio until 1958–9. His first big commercial success with Universal was *Magnificent Obsession,* a film produced by Ross Hunter, and starring Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson. *Magnificent Obsession* is an awful, but strong story, written by Lloyd C. Douglas, and first filmed by John Stahl in the 'thirties. Sirk's version would merit a study of its own, since it shows perhaps better than any other film the split-level construction to be found in almost all the movies he made for Ross Hunter. However, the point here is that *All That Heaven Allows* was thought up by the studio in order to cash in on the sudden success of *Magnificent Obsession.* The same producer: Ross Hunter; the same cast: Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson, Agnes Moorehead. Elements of the same structure — in particular Jane Wyman as the older woman, widowed, falling in love with a younger man.

From there on, of course, one must consider Sirk's work on the film. *All That Heaven Allows* has really got no story worth talking about — unlike *Magnificent Obsession,* which has a very strong and inflexible story, and an unavoidable structure. But it is precisely this flabbiness in *Heaven* (the result of its purely opportunist origins) which gives Sirk much more room. Thematically, *Heaven* is much richer than *Obsession;* stylistically, it is much better integrated (although *Obsession,* filmed by Russell Metty, contains several striking moments).

When praised, Sirk has tended to attract attention either as a 'stylist' (Sarris, the *Cahiers),* or as a master of the weepie. He certainly is an excellent stylist (having himself been a painter, amongst other things); and he was a master of the weepie — but he was not interested in the weepie. The lack of interest is just as important as the mastery. Both positions ('stylist'; 'master of the weepie') fail to go deep enough into that curious product which is a Sirk film.

With very few exceptions, all Sirk's films at Universal were composites, and they must therefore be 'viewed' as composites, as multi-layered products. On the one hand, they are the outcome of the demands of the front office at Universal, the desires and phantasies of producers like Ross Hunter, incarnated by actors and actresses like Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson, Lana Turner and Sandra Dee. On the other, they are the products of Douglas Sirk, lit and shot by Russell Metty (or Irving Glassberg).

This multi-layered quality, resulting from the composite nature of film production, ties up with the question of genre — in this case the melodrama. To my knowledge, a serious study of the melodrama remains to be written.[2] The very term 'melodrama' already indicates a composite of some kind. The general drift of the word is in the direction of emotion and sentiment (or sentimentality). It is a genre in both literature and cinema appealing to a mass audience. The record of Universal and of Ross Hunter in particular is very clear. The attraction for Sirk overlapped, but did not coincide with that of the studio and Hunter. Sirk was attracted by the mass audience, and by the scope which the melodrama gave him for making films about contemporary America. Indeed, as far as he was concerned, the melodrama was the genre which best allowed for comment on the society in which he was living and working — and not just comment, but criticism.

The reviews of Sirk's theatre work in Germany, particularly during his period at Bremen (1923-29), repeatedly praise his ability to transform and transcend unlikely material; and his first big hit in the cinema (*Schlussakkord,* 1936) was the result of his own transformation of the script (a melodrama). With space, it would be possible to study this constant in Sirk's work: the capacity to transform material, and the extremely precise *historical* awareness of the potentiality of a specific genre — whether in Germany or in America.

For most of Sirk's time at Universal, America was basking complacently under President Eisenhower. The society was already disintegrating, but this was not visible on the surface. The complacency of the Administration in Washington was shared with enthusiasm by entrepreneurs like Ross Hunter in Hollywood. The society thus promoted the melodrama, which was its own chosen genre. Yet, for Sirk, it was precisely the melodrama which allowed for a critical discourse on this society, and from a historical point

Life at the country club . . .

of view. It was the only genre able to ponder contemporary America — a capacity for self-analysis inevitably hidden from its most eager promoters. On the surface, Ross Hunter had his Jane Wyman-Rock Hudson 'weepie', complacent and complicit. Just beneath the surface, Douglas Sirk had a swingeing attack on petit bourgeois moralism — 'displaced' not only because of the varying exigencies of the studio, but also through choice.

Sirk has explained at some length his views on the *necessary* distance a critique of a certain kind of society must be placed at in order to make good cinema (or good theatre, or good literature).[3] His pantheon of references includes Euripides, Shakespeare, Ca'derón, Lope de Vega, Molière, Chekhov. Explicitness is to be avoided when working in a society like Eisenhowerian America — but not in a society like Weimar Germany, where Sirk staged plays like Blume's *Im Namen des Volkes* (about Sacco and Vanzetti). In other words, although the melodrama was the form presented to him by the studio, it was also the form which he himself chose, given the overall social situation.

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The melodrama was both the genre which was most available at a particular juncture in American history, and the genre which best allowed for a critical portrayal of the fossilization of the American bourgeoisie.

All That Heaven Allows is set in a small New England town. New England, the starting-point of white, WASP America. The place where contemporary America started, and started to go wrong. Yet also at the time (1955) perhaps the area of America least aware of what was really happening in the society as a whole. New England: the home of Thoreau and Emerson. Into *All That Heaven Allows* Sirk has built *the history of the concealed disintegration of the society.*

In the film Jane Wyman is a recently-widowed mother of two children, both of whom are of college age. Her dead husband was, apparently, a prosperous member of the local bourgeosie. They live in a white frame house, with a garden. Rock Hudson is the local gardener (independent businessman, but engaged in manual work). Hudson and his trees are both America's past and America's ideals. They are ideals which are now unattainable — and, when they actually offer themselves in concrete form, are swiftly rejected by Wyman and her bourgeois friends on her behalf. For, since the time when these ideals were established, the society has lost touch with its own past. It has become fossilized, unable to cope even with its own ideology.

It is, therefore, on the contemporary bourgeoisie that Sirk focusses his attention, showing it both in its isolation, and in its breakdowns — when confronted with its unattainable ideals. Rock Hudson and his world are sketched in with comparative ease: gardening, trees, a beat-up old station wagon, and a free and easy party, with check table-cloth, wine, lobsters, singing, dancing and nice friends. Wyman's world is more complex.

. . . and at home: even the children perpetuate tradition through repression

The town is introduced from the church steeple — recalling a scene in *Zu Neuen Ufern* (1937), where Paramatta, the penal settlement in Australia whither the heroine has been consigned by the British ruling class, is similarly introduced from its church tower (while the sound-track carries the voices of the women prisoners singing in church). The parallel, at least in Sirk's mind, seems to be there. Nor is the choice of the church steeple by any means haphazard: for the church, in Sirk's world, is one of the key agents of mystification — in contemporary America, as in a British colony a century before.

The steeple dominates the town, and from it the camera moves down, as the credits appear, across the town to Jane Wyman's house. In the very first scene Sirk establishes in masterly style two of his basic themes: loneliness and repression (the latter shown by embarassment). Agnes Moorehead, who later describes herself with the words, 'I'm Cary's best friend', suddenly tells Jane Wyman (Cary) she is too busy to have a planned lunch with her. Jane Wyman then embarassedly invites Rock Hudson to share the lunch — her desire to escape loneliness tentatively overcoming her mindless class isolation. From then on Hudson tries to draw Wyman out of her bourgeois world and prejudices. We are shown the specific components of this world: house (home), children, friends (so-called), and the country club. By all of these Cary is entrapped.

Primarily by her children, in an active sense. Sirk's attitude to children (and perhaps to American children in particular?) is a deeply pessimistic one. As he has explained, children are to be seen not as as the *new* generation, but as the imitators of the old, the perpetuators of tradition and repression, and thus both conservative and tragic. Both Jane Wyman's two children try to hold her in the past, with a wealth of nauseating selfishness and sexual oppression. They openly resent Rock Hudson on class grounds, as an insult to Dad's memory. Dad is still present in the form of his trophies, which sit like corpses on the fireplace. When Jane Wyman removes them, after she starts her affair with Hudson, the children object vigorously. They fight to keep the home as a mausoleum. They actually want to mummify their mother.[4]

So do her friends. Sara Warren (Agnes Moorehead), while claiming to provide sympathy and understanding, is basically an agent of repression — although she *mediates* the oppression of others by leavening it with a modicum of intelligence and 'sympathy'. Thus, of course, she is more insidious than the blatant Mona Plash (Jacqueline de Witt), the town gossip. (There is also a more complicated division of labour in the repression: Mona's is more on the sexual front, Sara's on the class front). Wyman's insecurity is thus depicted as eminently *social.* She has no one to whom to turn to check out her condition, since everyone has an ideological stake in keeping her a widow — children, friends, and Harvey, her elderly and tedious suitor.

Much of the film is a slashing assault on pretence, one of Sirk's favourite themes. It is not the structural core to the film, as it is in, for example, *Stützen der Gesellschaft* (1935) or *All I Desire* (1953); but *Heaven,* along with *Imitation of Life* (1958) represents Sirk's most sustained dissection of pretence connected with class, fakery which has accumulated historically and now caked into ideology.

Sirk's interest in illness and ailments has already been noted by several critics.[5] There is a long parade of the lame and the blind. And a parallel gallery of doctors. But what has been less stressed is Sirk's interest in *social* illness and breakdown, of which individual sickness is only a component, or a reflection.

Several of Sirk's films are examinations of communities or societies unknowingly on the verge of breakdown, and he therefore focuses on the moments and the locales of collapse: churches, doctors' consulting rooms, hospitals, bars and parties. Clergymen and doctors are not symbols in Sirk's films. They are there because they do actually inhabit the interstices of life. Sirk delights in portraying people edging toward crisis, or in crisis, for it is in this condition that they reveal themselves — drinking, praying and in their 'love life' (people also reveal themselves, but for the good, in painting, singing and dancing). With breakdown comes the smashing of pretence. At the country club, the prosperous bourgeoisie, attempting to oppress Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson, brings itself close to breakdown — Howard Hoffer (Donald Curtis), sufficiently inebriated, makes an awful pass at Cary, bringing on Hudson's break with the club (but not Wyman's).

The two parties in *Heaven* are the two condensations of the alternative worlds. The party given by Hudson's friends, the Andersons, helps to open up to Cary a vision of the life she might have with him; the country club party only serves to solidify her weakness (and her 'best friend' helps to accentuate this). Unable to integrate Hudson into her wretched world, overcome *with embarassment,* she decides to drop him — much to the delight of her children.

At this point, Sirk introduces his Thoreau elements, obliquely. Hudson's condition is made clear while he is out hunting with a friend, clad in full New England hunting gear — a scene repeated in *Written on the Wind,* where Hudson also goes hunting, this time with his father, a proletarian Irishman, to shake the world of the millionaire Hadleys out of his system. 'You're no good to anyone, and you're no good to yourself' his friend tells him. 'I know' says Hudson. Likewise, Cary, now suffering from recurrent headaches visits the doctor (Dr. Hennessy), who tells her it is nature's way of protesting. 'Can't you give me something?' she asks. To which comes the Sirkian answer: 'Do you expect me to give you a prescription for life?' The doctor then advises her to marry Hudson. The parallel here hardly needs emphasizing: nature in Hudson's case is the actual environment, the world he is living in; in Wyman's case it is something still internal, fighting for expression, which has to be revealed to her by her headaches and then by the doctor.

The end reflects the film's origins in *Magnificent Obsession.* After an accident (to Hudson), *Heaven* ends with Wyman tending a prostrate Hudson, just recovering consciousness; in *Obsession* it is Hudson (a doctor) tending the prostrate Wyman, just recovering consciousness and sight. But whereas in *Obsession* the *camera moves from the sickbed to a desert* landscape seen through the window, with the sun rising, in *Heaven* it moves to the picture-window, with snow outside and a doe.

Yet this ending has to be queried, in the light of Sirk's repeated statements of his antipathy to 'happy ends' (an antipathy which emerges from the very structure and thematic of his work). There is much indication that *Heaven* would have been improved without its 'happy end'. The themes of disintegration and despair so dear to Sirk would have fitted much better into a gloomy end. There is, therefore, a deep irony built into *Heaven.* Is Jane Wyman really reconstructed? Has she broken with her past? For sure, the New England town has not come round to sympathize with her position.

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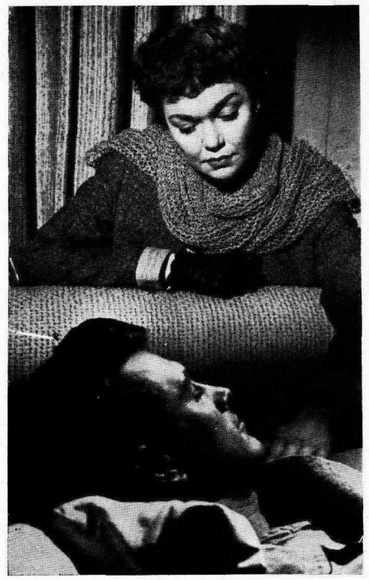
Heaven is not a major Sirk film, simply because of the fact that it was not one of his own projects, and was burdened with the legacy of *Magnificent Obsession.* But it *is* a fairly representative Sirk. And for this reason a good object of analysis.

Heaven is a film about *apparently marginal* issues, which in fact are *utterly central* to the America of the Eisenhower epoch. Sirk has managed to depict both the concrete and the abstract — both the inhabitants of America, and their class *relations* by showing the space between people, how they meet. The ruling class (attacked right through Sirk's films from *Stützen* onwards, and particularly in *Written on the Wind)* is sustained only by pretence, and therefore has to live by ritual. They are actually cut off from each other. The character of Harvey here is exemplary. Harvey lives by —and inspires — only ritual. He drinks, eats, drives his car, and talks in a ritual. It is for him that Ned (Cary's son) applies himself to mixing martinis, over which they exchange completely vapid comments (Harvey describing a wonderful doctor he has just found on a trip to Florida). *In such a world, things have* become as important as people — Dad's trophies as though they were him, Hudson's old station wagon as being him, *etc.*

The finest condensation of ritual and materialism comes at Christmas. And here one must pay homage to Sirk for bringing together in masterly and effortless way the themes of Thoreau and the New England Christmas (via trees). Christmas is the moment of mass mystification, the accentuation of ritual and the obliteration of other people. It is a time of alcohol, and of materialism (the gift). It is also a time of spectacle. Jane Wyman, having announced clearly that getting a TV set would be an acknowledgement of her loneliness, is given a TV by her children — in order to keep her immured in her loneliness. Framed in mistletoe, the set is brought forward to the sound of the salesman's voice: 'drama, comedy, all life's parade at your fingertips'. The set is not turned on — all it shows is Wyman's face reflected in the blank screen, framed by the mistletoe. What is so impressive about this sequence is that it is *simultaneously* visually extraordinarily striking and sociologically, a brilliant resumé of the oppression of the gift — since the TV has been given more in the interest of the givers, than in the interests of the recipient. Furthermore, this gift is placed squarely within the bourgeois family, and at Christmas



Wyman tending a prostrate Hudson

time (Sirk returns to Christmas, though more elliptically, in *Imitation of Life).*[6]

Andrew Sarris has rightly praised Sirk's audacity, and written that 'the essence of Sirkian cinema is the direct confrontation of all material, however fanciful and improbable'.[7] This does, however, need to be applied not merely to Sirk's visual style (and his musical style, also of great complexity) but to the actual material at hand, and to the social confrontations in his films: the confrontations between social classes in *Zu Neuen Ufern,* between British oppressors and Irish revolutionaries in *Captain Lightfoot,* between generations and races and classes in *Imitation of Life.* Sirk's audacity is indeed visual and musical, but it is also a social audacity — the ability to bring alive a whole society, whether it be New England in the fifties, or Nazi Germany near the end of the war (*A Time to Love and a Time to Die*); this confrontation of material is, in other words, the presentation of the conflicts and contradictions within the society. *All That Heaven Allows,* although a film by a German emigrant, is certainly one of the best and most revealing films about America on the verge of its breakdown.

Jon Halliday

1 I have tried to remedy these defects in my book of interviews, *Sirk on Sirk,* London and New York, (Cinema One), 1972.
2 For recent contributions on the subject, see Bibliography in this issue [Ed. note].
3 Sirk himself (in *Sirk on Sirk*) has emphasized that 'the play must please'. There is certainly an important psychic aspect to the apparent 'displacement' operated in Sirk's melodramas. One of Freud's collaborators, Hanns Sachs embarked on an attempt to adumbrate a theory of displacement in the cinema in the 'twenties (Hanns Sachs, 'Film Psychology', *Close Up* vol. III, no 5 (November 1928).
4 Wyman's daughter actually talks to her (in her bedroom) about how they used to wall up widows in the pyramids.
5 Particularly Jean-Louis Comolli in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 189 (April 1967).
6 On the gift, see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift,* London 1970
7 Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema,* New York, 1968, p. 109. In the light of Sirk's information it is necessary to reject the comparison-assimilation between Sirk and Stahl suggested by Sarris.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDIO-PICTURE

Narrative Patterns in some Hollywood Films of the 20's

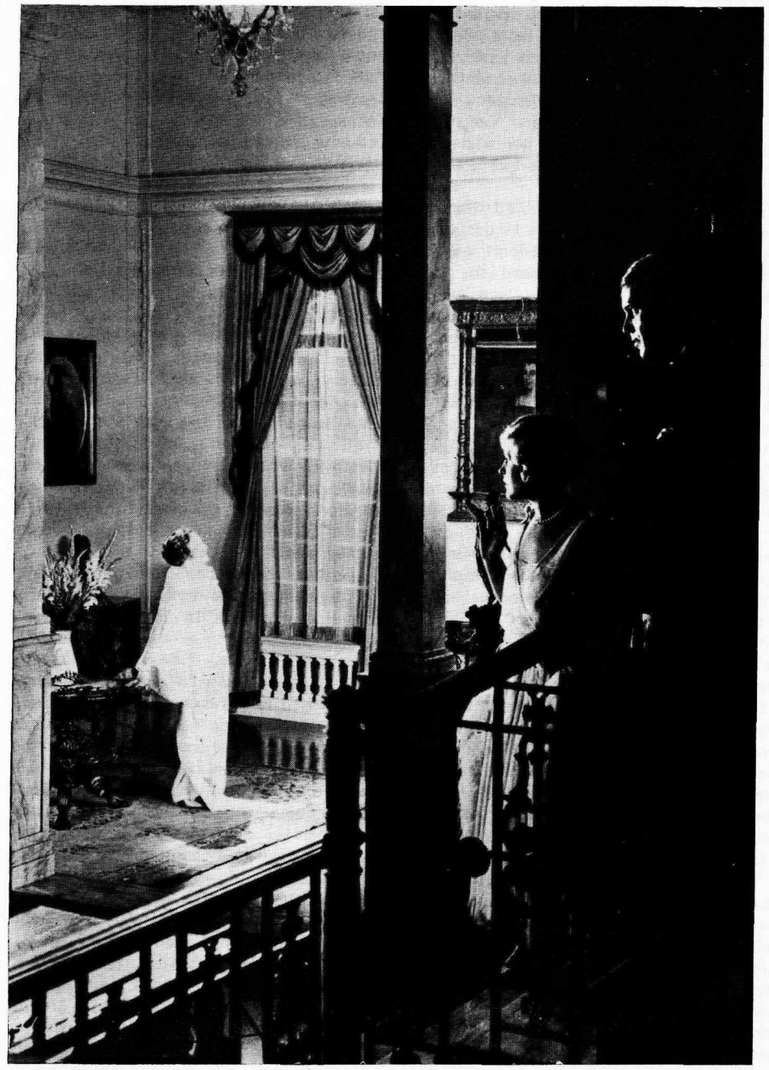
For most of its existence the American film industry has operated with an incredible awareness and acceptance of the desires and responses of its potential audiences. Many directors, for example, have been willing to submerge their own interests in order to satisfy their audiences' values and expectations. Though critics have generally treated such occurrences as cynical examples of box office expediency or the sacrifice of artistic integrity, a closer examination of these directors' statements reveals not opportunism but an abiding trust in, and willingness to serve, the values of the masses who compose their potential audiences. René Clair's description of a preview audience's response to his film, *I Married a Witch,* sums up this implicit trust: 'The audience can be a collection of imbeciles, idiots, and cretins. They may not know anything about movies, perhaps they don't know anything about anything. But by bringing them together a sort of collective genius arises from among them, a collective, spontaneous way of reacting to your film. And that genius is right, no matter how wrong each of them might be separately. When they start coughing, you know you've lost their attention, it's time to start wondering what you've done wrong.'[1]

The following statement by King Vidor illustrates the way in which this sort of artist willingly adjusts his personal interests and preoccupations to those of his audience: 'Elmer Rice, the playwright, once said, "As a dramatist's intellect grows, his audience becomes smaller." I don't wholly concur with Mr. Rice, because I believe that no subject is over the heads of an audience if its is told simply, clearly, and sincerily. But I do believe that as the intellect of an artist grows, the scope of the things that interest him most certaily diminishes. A film story then must find a sympathetic understanding in the mind and emotions of the man who will bring it to life, and he must be able so to translate and interpret these ideas that they will engender a favourable reaction in the minds and emotions of the spectators.

'I will not deny that it is a great satisfaction to know that people are standing in line to see one of my films. I am constantly in search of a story that will so fulfill the needs and aspirations of the public that word-of-mouth advertising will fill the theatres for months on end.'[2]

This audience-centred aesthetic appears most conspicuously in the practice of previewing a new film before an unsuspecting audience prior to the film's general release. While the audience would record its reactions on cards after the performance, studio production staffs would be most interested in the spontaneous reactions that occurred during the screening, and would reshape the film to eliminate boring or inappropriate passages. Frank Capra taped an audience's reactions to a preview of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* in order to obtain an objective record of their responses: '. . . in the quiet of my office, away from the flushfaced hysteria of curbstone conferences, the tape told me the detailed

Clarence Brown's Smouldering Fires



story, foot by foot, scene by scene, of exactly what happened at the preview. Where the film was interest-grabbing, the audience was silent, hushed. Where it was dull or long, I heard coughs, shufflings, rattlings of peanut bags. The laughs — from giggles to guffaws — were measured exactly in length and volume. To our surprise some gags were funnier, others less funny, than expected. Some good lines were lost in the over-laughs. We picked up many added laughs by lengthening the film between gag lines. And so, like tailors tearing apart and rebuilding a coat to their chalk marks, we re-edited our film to the tape.'[3]

The following story about Clara Bow illustrates how an audience's posible reaction could influence even the style of acting *during* a film's production. Clarence Badger, the director of *It,* relates this in a letter to Mr James Card of Eastman House, who made it available to me: 'When filming her in one particular close-up shot for *It*, which called for expression of that great moment when love first enters a young girl's heart, Clara, following my directions, gazed at her 'sweetheart' with an expression of lingering, calf-like longing on her pretty face; perfectly all right if she had stopped there. But she did not. Continuing on, the camera still grinding away, her doll-like tantalizing eyes suddenly became inflamed with unwholesome passion. Then the young rascal suddenly changed her expression again, this time to one of virtuous, innocent appeal.

'I stopped the camera. "And what was that all about, Clara?" I demanded. "Well," she came back, "if you knew your onions like you're supposed to, you'd know that first expression was for the love-sick dames in the audience, and that the second expression, that passionate stuff, was for the boys and their papas, and that that third expression — well, Mr Badger, just about the time all the old women in the audience had become shocked and scandalized by the passionate part, they'd suddenly see that third expression, become absorbed in it, and change their minds about me having naughty ideas, and go home thinking how pure and innocent I was; and having got me mixed up personally with this character I'm playing, they'd come again when my next picture showed up." '

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Within such an audience-centred aesthetic, then, directors seemed to view their role as artists to be the presentation of their audience's common experience in a sharper than usual form. Unlike directors who worked in an artist-centred aesthetic, in which their audiences had to submerge their own common interests in in order to discover the directors' personal interests, these directors were content to meet their audiences on their own terms.[4] These statements also suggest the manipulative function of film narrative. Capra's description of his job as analogous to a tailor's neatly sums up the aesthetic of the studio film. Furthermore, since the communality of experience assumed by such an aesthetic precludes the ambiguity found in artist-centred films, the narrative patterns of these movies, and their effects, are unusually accessible to critical examination. Films of this type need not interpretation but careful descriptive criticism which delineates how a story is told and, on that basis, attempts to specify the particular effect caused by a specific narrative method.

The narrative Hollywood films of the 1920's, especially those concerned with what might roughly be called the realistic problems of everyday life, offer an excellent opportunity for such critical examination, since they exhibit similar narrative techniques owing less to production line standardization than to economical and effective storytelling. In all of this, it is important to recognize that while the narrative content — the portion generally treated by critical interpretation — is not complex, its presentation within an effective form still raises the same sort of complicated problems as the ambiguous narratives of artist-centred films.

Film narrative and literary narrative are different in degree. Where the reader of a novel can pause in the midst of reading to think about what he has read, or skip back to reread an earlier section, the film viewer has no chance to take such a pause. Once a film begins it generally runs through to its conclusion without a stop. Seen from this perspective there is a greater necessity for film narrative to ensure that the viewer immediately and clearly understands what happens in the movie. And since film is not purely intellectual, the narrative content must be embodied in some satisfying form. In other words, the narrative must be logically coherent to the audience while also having the feel of emotional aptness.

In film, as in literature, these dual aims of narrative seem most usually to be achieved by means of the repetition of some kind of minimal unit. Logically, this sort of repetition ensures understanding; emotionally, it creates the feeling of familiarity. Though the idea of a 'minimal unit' may seem vague, the concept is necessary to encompass such diverse elements as action in the Aristotelean sense, gesture, camera movement, the arrangement of actors within the frame, or any other narrative component that might be repeated. The concept of a 'minimal unit' of repeated material is also useful because it allows one to distinguish between major and minor examples of repetition.

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In *The Freshman* (directed by Sam Taylor and Fred Newmeyer, 1925), Harold Lloyd is a college freshman who directs all of his energies towards becoming the most popular man on campus. He frequently discovers that some sort of chained-down object stands between himself and his goal. In its first appearance, the object is a ferocious bulldog chained to its doghouse. Harold encounters it when he chases a football that has gone out of the practice area and landed within the compass of the chain. He manages to get the ball by allowing the dog to chase him. He effectively shortens the length of the chain by getting the dog to wrap it around a pipe imbedded in the lawn between the doghouse and the football. When he has retrieved the ball, however, the dog breaks its chain and he just manages to outrace it back to the safety of the practice area's fence. Later, much to his embarassment, a football attached to the ground by a rope snaps back at him when he throws it. In the third instance of this pattern, he needs a hip flask for the tailor who cannot repair his suit without a drink — Harold has gone to a dance in a basted suit — and slips a flask from the hip pocket of another dancer only to discover that it is attached to the pocket by a chain. He is discovered as soon as he unwittingly tugs on the chain. Finally, near the end of his college's football game, with his team trailing, Harold catches the ball, but becomes frightened by the mass of tacklers bearing down on him. Here, he unthreads most of the football's laces and, holding the free end of the laces in his hand, sets the football down on the ground several feet away from himself. When the tacklers go for the ball, he deftly snaps the ball back to himself and walks down the field. Just as in the first example in the series, however, he is forced into a run when the other players realize what has happened.

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For an audience, though not for Harold, each repetition of the basic minimal unit creates both a sense of familiarity and a certain expectation based upon the way it had functioned in its previous occurrence or occurrences. By a funding of information and expectation, the series becomes more pleasing as it progresses. One can understand how this sort of repetition is meant to provide a sense of structure for an audience through one sequence in Buster Keaton's *Go West* (1925).

Keaton plays a fumbling, young man who leaves Indiana to find his fortune first in New York City and then in the far West. In New York he is repeatedly trampled by crowds of people on the sidewalks: somehow, he always seems to be going in the opposite direction. Once out West, he works on a cattle ranch where he ultimately falls in love with a cow named 'Brown Eyes'. When he learns that the cattle are to be shipped to the Los Angeles' stockyards by train, he desperately searches for a way to save the cow. Through many complications, including an attempted hijacking of the train which leaves him alone at its controls, he brings the train to a stop in the Los Angeles terminal. He is still several miles from the stockyards (the train missed a spur line) and since the ranch-owner's future depends upon the delivery of the cattle on time, Keaton begins to lead the the trainload of cattle through the city streets to the yards. He hopes that the owner may give him 'Brown Eyes' if the rest of the herd arrives there on time. Some cattle begin to stray. In desperation, he remembers how he once managed to get a steer to return to a coral by waving something red at it. Hoping to repeat the trick, he runs into a costume shop, demands something red to wear, and emerges dressed in a devil's suit with horns and a long tail. The suit helps him to lead the herd to the stockyard without

further trouble.

Even though Keaton consciously repeats the use of red to attract and control the herd, other repetitions occur in this sequence of which he is unaware. First, Keaton leads a herd rather than being trampled by one, as in New York City. Secondly, the horns and tail of the costume, rather than its colour, serve to emphasize his relationship with 'Brown Eyes', and demonstrate that he has changed since their first encounter in which she saved him from a bull. It is interesting that what concerns him in the sequence, obtaining something red, cannot be seen by the audience since the film is in black and white. Nevertheless, the unannounced repetition of the crowd situation and the details of the devil's costume cues in an audience's awareness that the character, like Harold in *The Freshman,* is finally in control of the events around him.

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While these repetitive patterns consist of the actions of a film's central character, *Smouldering Fires* (directed by Clarence Brown, 1925) employs spatial arrangements as reiterative punctuation to achieve the same effect. In this story of a love triangle composed of Jane Vale, the middle-aged president of a clothing manufacturing company, Robert Elliott, a production line inspector in the plant, and Dorothy Vale, Jane's attractive younger sister, Brown represents the triangle by returning, again and again, to the three figures arranged in a triangular grouping, most frequently with Robert and Dorothy each to one side and slightly below Jane in a pyramidal fashion. Brown emphasizes their divided passions by separating the group of three into two, spatially severed from the single other figure. Frequently, one member of the trio is inside a building or a room while the other two are outside that area. Thus at one point Jane is in the kitchen while Dorothy and Robert, standing outside, discuss the best way to tell Jane that Robert no longer wants to marry her. Brown accentuates the separation by cutting back and forth between the locations.

Smouldering Fires is an extraordinarily structured and polished film in which an audience is constantly reminded of the triangularity of the love situation. The sequence involving Jane in the kitchen concludes with a shot of her, Robert and Dorothy which sums up the problem of the rest of the movie. With Robert standing between them, emblematically establishing him as their common interest, Jane and Dorothy prepare to pull at opposite ends of a wishbone. The next shot shows a bell tower composed of three bells, the central one above the two flanking ones, pealing for Jane's and Robert's wedding. The next shot, again involving a triad, shows Jane and Robert kneeling before a minister. It is taken from behind the kneeling figures so that the couple flank the minister who towers above them.

At another point, after her marriage to Robert, Jane stands in Dorothy's bedroom trying to comfort her crying sister, while Robert is in the garden below. Jane asks Dorothy who has hurt her, and when Dorothy refuses to talk, she begins to name some of the men who were at their party that evening. Still talking, she moves to the French windows overlooking the garden, opens them and calls out 'Bobby' to her husband below. She then sees, reflected in the open window pane, Dorothy's startled expression at the mention of Robert's name. Jane pretends, however, not to have seen anything, and on her way out she passes between the portraits of a man and a woman which frame the doorway. This is a visual equivalent of her new knowledge and position — she realizes that she now stands between Dorothy and Robert — and a variation of the triangular groupings mentioned above.

Another reiterative pattern in the film is of unintentional eavesdropping, a functional adjunct to the use of space, as when Jane sees Dorothy in the window-pane. Jane gradually realizes that her husband actually loves Dorothy and she engineers a situation that turns upon both reiterative patterns and allows her to sacrifice her love for the others' happiness. At Dorothy's twenty-first birthday party, Jane is seated at a table with Dorothy, Robert, and Scotty McDougal, an old trusted employee from the days when Jane's father ran the company. Though Jane has a present at hand to give to Dorothy, she pushes it off the table and sends Robert upstairs to fetch it from her dresser drawer. When Robert calls down that the drawer is locked, Jane sends Dorothy upstairs with the key to open it. Then, as Dorothy and Robert begin to come downstairs, but are still not visible to Jane, Jane loudly complains to Scotty that her marriage to Robert was a mistake, that she has been a fool to love such a younger man, and that she now wants her freedom. She has made sure that while Dorothy and Robert cannot see her, they can overhear her. When the pair re-enter the room, they move to Jane and form another triangular grouping with which the movie ends. Even though Jane consciously employs a method which is part of the structural patterns that I have been examining, she is not aware of it as a pattern. It is the director, Brown, who is aware of the meaning of the spatial separations that occur in the film.

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Skinner's Dress Suit (directed by William Seiter, 1926) presents two other kinds of repetitive patterns employed in many other films of the period. First, the movie begins and ends in the same place, Skinner's house, and at about the same time of day, 7.15am. Skinner is an accountant who weakly acquiesces in his wife's desires to keep up with the Joneses. He allows her to believe that he has received a substantial raise and she goes on a buying binge with credit on small monthly payments. The frenetic pace with which Skinner tries to keep up with his wife's growing burden of debts is established in the opening sequence. Our introduction to him is a sequence of him rushing through breakfast. His watch is shown: the time is 7.15 and he is hurrying to catch the 7.32 commuter train. At the end of the film, his bosses arrive at his home at 7.15 and offer to rehire him — he has lost his job during the film — with a promotion.

Other comedies that make use of this pattern include *Mantrap* (directed by Victor Fleming, 1926) where one of the main characters, a divorce lawyer, begins and ends the film by counselling the same client in his office, and *Tilly the Toller* (directed by Hobart Henley, 1927) in which at both the beginning and end Tilly arrives for work at 'Simpkin's Household Appliance Company'.

In *Mantrap,* the lawyer at first cannot stand listening to the complaints of women any more, and decides to make off to the Canadian woods. Yet at the end of the film, through an encounter with a character at a trading post in the woods, played by Clara Bow, the lawyer returns to his New York office with a different attitude. He again counsels the woman whose complaints forced him to flee, but now views her as a potential conquest rather than a nuisance. At the beginning of *Tilly the Toiler,* Tilly tries to get a job at Simpkin's in order to be near her boyfriend; at the end, she returns to Simpkin's to ask for her job back only to discover that it has already gone to someone else. Her boyfriend, whom she has left as well, offers her a 'job' as his wife, however, which she accepts.

In each pattern the ending differs from the beginning in some way although the location and time of day for both are the same.

Underwold (directed by Joseph Von Sternberg, 1927) begins with a bank robbery at 2am and ends with the aftermath of a foiled jailbreak that is planned to occur at roughly the same time. The character who successfully breaks into the bank at the beginning of the film, 'Bull' Weed, is the object of the unsuccesful attempt to break him out of jail near the film's conclusion. *Underworld* presents a variation of this pattern in that a meeting with confederates at a different locale, the hideout, is associated with both, the successful bank robbery and the abortive attempt at a jailbreak.

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Since I have been listing different sorts of repetitive narrative patterns, it seems appropriate to conclude with a film in which the repetition ultimately comes to haunt a character when she desperately tries to avoid it. The film is *Lady of Chance* (directed by Robert Z. Leonard, 1928) in which Norma Shearer portrays a confidence-woman named Dolly Morgan. Her speciality is extorting money from wealthy married men whom she lures to her hotel room. At the appropriate moment, her 'husband' bursts in and the embarrassed man is threatened with public exposure and scandal unless he pays them to remain silent.

At the beginning of the movie she has selected a new man to shake down in this way. Before she can put her plan into effect, two people she used to work with, Brad and Gwen, demand that she cut them into whatever her current plan is, or they will tell the police where to find her. This frightens her since the police are already on her tail. Thus from the

first, Dolly finds herself in the same position in which she places her victims. She reluctantly agrees to team up with them and together they shake down the man she had been working on. Brad and Gwen have no intention of sharing the money with her, however, and when she asks for her share, Brad tells her the man stopped payment on the check he gave them. He offers her twenty dollars 'out of the goodness of his heart'. Dolly knows he is lying and steals all the money from where Brad has hidden it. She then runs away to find another man to fleece.

At a tile and cement convention in Atlantic City, Dolly overhears one man (Steve Crandall) mention a business deal for a million dollars, and she begins to work on him. Coquettery fails and she realizes that the only way to get at his money is by marrying him. When he proposes, she accepts, but as she packs to leave with him, Brad appears at her hotel room door and demands the money she ran off with. Dolly coyly says she lost it and offers him twenty dollars. He refuses it, but steals it when she is not looking. Here, then, is a repetition, in reversed fashion, of what had happened between them earlier.

Once again, Brad demands to be cut into her current plan. She agrees and tells him to hide in the bathroom until he hears her cough. He does so. Room service, which she had called earlier, arrives and Dolly whispers to the bellhop to waite outside. Brad thinks Steve has arrived. Dolly packs quickly, while carrying on a conversation as though a man were in the room; she signals the bellhop back into the room to remove her luggage quietly. All this time Brad waits for her signal. After she has left with the luggage a maid enters the room to straighten it. She sees the things brought up by room service and helps herself to them. She lights a cigarette, inhales, and then coughs. Brad, thinking it the signal he has been waiting for, bursts into the room only to discover that he has been tricked again.

Now married to Steve, Dolly learns that he is not wealthy and in disgust she runs away trying to find another mark. But she comes to realize that she has fallen in love with Steve and returns to him. At various points in the film she has used tears to distract men and convince them that she was helpless rather than predatory. Now her change is marked by sincere tears which reveal her honest love for Steve. She decides to hide her past, but Brad and Gwen find her again and threaten to reveal her identity to Steve unless she helps them to swindle him. Steve has sold a formula for extra-hard cement and Brad means to be his 'business advisor'. In a moment of selfsacrifice, however, Dolly reveals her past to Steve as well as her original reason for marrying him. In doing so, she acts to protect his interests even though she expects to lose his love as a result. Happily, he still loves her after he learns the truth.

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Dolly is a confidence-woman who continually outsmarts herself. The basic repetitive pattern in which Brad and Gwyn reappear occasionally to threaten her with exposure is a structural device that organizes the narrative of the film while continuously reminding the audience of the way that her racket may turn against her. In addition, the final threat from Brad and Gwen, involving Steve, ends the repetitive series by presenting the audience with the opportunity to review the entire film retrospectively. Even the film's final setting, a suite of hotel rooms in New York City, invites retrospection since it was the initial milieu where Dolly picked out her first victim. Thus in each of the films that I have mentioned in which the conclusion occurs in the same locale as the movie's opening sequences, the qualitative differences between the two situations reveal both the purpose of the film and the vehicle through which an audience is brought to feel that the problem has been finally resolved. To understand this, however, one must recognize the several functions that repetition can perform.

At its basic level, a simple repetitive series creates both a sense of comprehension within an audience, as well as the sort of pleasure that comes from having an expectation fulfilled. In the series A B C A B C A B C, once the pattern is perceived, an audience both understands the rationale that generates it and from an awareness of it, extrapolates the expectation that the basic unit of the series, A B C, will continue to recur. while it is not easy to point out exactly where in the series an audience would realize the underlying pattern — it would probably coincide with the second C or the third A — once it did, the forming of expectations about following elements would begin. This sort of series has two drawbacks, however. Firstly, once the organizational logic of the series has been understood, subsequent repetitions would become boring unless they were presented as light variations of one another. However much pleasure there might have been in seeing its expectations realized, an audience may finally come to feel the sameness of the pattern and lose interest in it. Secondly, this kind of series is open-ended. In other words, there is no special, inherent reason for the series to end after ten repetitions of the basic unit rather than after twenty or thirty repetitions. Though the point at which boredom replaces the pleasure of fulfilled expectations might seem to indicate a functional end point for the series. It is not necessarily a reduction, nor is it emotionally satisfying.

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Translating this concept of serial repetition from the level of alphabetical symbols, to that of narrative content, one can understand how narrative concerns provide a naturally inherent point at which a series is brought to conclusion. Though I know of no writers who have treated this problem in cinematic terms, it has been examined in terms of poetry by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. As she describes the problem of bringing a series to conclusion: '... it is clear that a poem cannot continue indefinitely; at some point the state of expectation must be modified so that we are prepared not for continuation but for cessation. Closure, then, may be regarded as a modification of structure that makes stasis, or the absence of further continuation, the most probable succeeding event. Closure allows the reader to be satisfied by the failure of continuation or, put another way, it creates in the reader the expectation of nothing.'[5]

Elsewhere, she defines 'closure' as 'the sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or "clinch"'[6] that one feels when a series comes to a conclusion instead of simply ending. Since closure generally occurs at the end of a work, the final element of a series of repetitions — the last appearance of the basic minimal unit — invites an audience to review the entire series retrospectively. Smith's comments on this phenomenon are especially cogent: 'Although stability implies composure and absence of further expectations, this does not mean that our experience of the work ceases abruptly at the last word. On the contrary, at that point we should work not now as a succession of events, but as an integral design. ... The "ultimate stability" of the work refers not to a point at which the observer's or reader's experience is "finished", but to a point at which without residual expectations, he can experience the structure of the work as, at once, both dynamic and whole.'[7]

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To return to *Lady of Chance*. Dolly ends by being caught in a special and more dangerous kind of double-bind. Where Brad's and Gwen's first threats to expose her merely involved the police finding her, their last threat involves exposing her past to the man she loves. In each case, the threat of exposure is a constant theme. Dolly's resolution of the final threat of the series is particularly satisfying because it also involves a resolution of the other threats as well. In order to prevent Brad and Gwen from carrying out their final threat, Dolly admits everything, herself, to her husband. At this point, the initial threats of exposure to the police are resolved gratuitously. A detective who has been searching for her from before the beginning of the movie, and who has recognized her in the hotel's lobby, arrives with other officers to arrest her. They appear immediately after Dolly's confession to Steve and actually prevent Brad, enraged by her confession, from harming Dolly. Thus what had haunted Dolly throughout the film, her arrest by the police. finally saves her when she is faced with potential harm.

An even simpler and more common method of achieving closure occurs in *Happiness* (directed by King Vidor, 1923). The film's main character, Jenny Wreay, is a poor but proud young woman who means to own an exclusive dress shop one day. The film open with her as an errand girl in an exclusive dress shop. In a few years, she does open her own shop, without any aid from a wealthy group of people she has met. The film ends with the arrival there of a young girl, also named Jenny, who applies for the job of errand girl at the salary of eight dollars a week,

the same amount as the now successful Jenny used to earn. The kind of retrospective patterning that Smith describes is recognizable here.

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Perhaps the clearest way to understand how much this Gestaltist approach to structure can contribute to descriptive film criticism might be through its application to *Lonesome* (directed by Paul Fejos, 1928). The film follows the usual format of love stories: boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-finds-girl. The problem of credibility is complicated by the fact that the pair, Jim and Mary, live next door to one another throughout the film. Their accidental discovery of this precipitates their reunion at the end of the film. Their isolation despite residing in adjoining apartments neatly conveys the lonesomeness of a large city, New York in the film, yet the movies' resolution runs the serious risk of seeming to be no more than contrived cuteness. Fejos prevents this from occurring, by a very careful repetitive structure that includes most of the patterns I have mentioned as well as others.

Perhaps the best way to describe the sort of repetitive unit that Fejos provides in the film is to delineate it as a situation which two people share in some way without being aware of their common interest in it. Thus the film opens with a sequence in which both Mary and Jim awaken, dress, and leave for work. The shared situation here is the time of day and the same general set of actions. Their separation is accentuated visually by presenting the pair out of synchronization. Jim awakens later than Mary and must rush through the same routine that she follows. Next, both appear in the same restaurant for breakfast but do not come into contact with one another. Mary has a full tray of food and eats a leisurely meal while Jim, because he is still late, hurriedly gulps a cup of coffee at the counter, wolfs down a dougnut, and rushes out with another doughnut between his teeth. Each is then shown on the subway and, then, arriving at work at the same plant and going through the same process of changing into work clothes. Finally, each punches in at a separate time clock. In all of this they never meet or notice one another.

At this point, Fejos establishes their proximity through a lateral camera movement that dissolves a shot of Mary at a switchboard into a shot of Jim at a machine in the shop. When the camera pans to the left, the shot of Jim appears; when it pans to the right, Mary appears. This sequence presents them at work throughout the work day. Fejos continues their association with the same block of time, in fact, by superimposing a clockface over their images in this long sequence. Where they had been out of synchronization before, they are now equals in terms of the time of the work day.

Since it is the Third of July, the work day ends at one o'clock for the holiday weekend. Fejos again presents the pair in parallel situations when they emerge from the plant and emphasizes it through more panning from right to left. This time, however, Jim is established at the right and Mary at the left as they stand outside their respective entrances to the plant, each surrounded by co-workers of the same sex. As the sequence continues, intercutting between the two groups, the women around Mary are met by their boyfriends, and the men around Jim met by their girlfriends. No one meets Mary or Jim, though each is invited by different couples to join them for the weekend. Each declines the offer.

Back in their respective appartments, neither can concentrate, feeling oppressed by the heat and the prospect of a lonely weekend. Both look out of their windows, in turn, and notice that music is coming from a passing sound track advertising weekend fun at Coney Island. Both decide to go there. Here, the sound track provides the associational linkage between the two that the time of day or the space of the restaurant and factory had provided earlier. The resolution of the film will also occur through an aural linkage.

It is on the bus to Coney Island that Jim first notices Mary. Though separated from her by the other passengers, and by other crowds when they alight, he finally catches up with her and begins to court her. Eventually, they change into bathing suits and sit together on the beach. They begin to fall in love. Where they had been out of synchronization with each other, then in synchronization during work, they are now alike in their obliviousness to clock time. A bell rings to announce the closing of the beach at six o'clock, but they do not hear it. As darkness falls, they are still sitting, alone, on the now deserted beach. Where they had been lonely in the midst of crowds, their companionship now renders the presense of absence of a crowd immaterial. Thus this sequence is also a reversal, in the terms of its effects upon the couple, of the earlier sequence at the factory where the dispersion of the crowd made Jim and Mary feel their loneliness more acutely. Originally oblivious of one another, they are now oblivious of everyone but each other.

After changing clothes, Jim wins a doll for Mary and takes her to dine at a restaurant in the amusement park, where after eating, they dance to the song 'Always' and then leave to ride the roller coaster. Up to the point, the movement of the film has been from their separate isolation to their shared companionship on the beach and at dinner. With the roller coaster Fejos re-establishes their separation. The roller coaster, known as a 'Derby Racer', consists of two trains of cars that run on parallel tracks and race one another. Thus their separateness also re-establishes the earlier theme of the lack of synchronization between the couple. Indeed, Jim and Mary are separated at the ride and forced to sit in different trains. Mary sits in the right-hand seat of the first right-hand car, while Jim sits in the left-hand seat of the first left-hand car. The physical design of the roller coaster trains, then, repeats the earlier lateral camera movements that established Jim and Mary in terms of left and right. As the trains race each other, a fire begins in the wheels of Mary's car. Though both trains are brought to a stop, Jim cannot get to her because of the crowd surrounding her car. This repeats the difficulty he had in reaching her when they first arrived at Coney Island. In fact, a policeman tells Jim to get out of the way and arrests him when Jim continues trying to get to Mary.

When Jim returns to the ride Mary is no longer there. She had fainted when the fire began and then gone in search of him after coming to. Jim and Mary know only each other's first name, and now search for one another by showing the others' picture to carnival barkers. Though they cross and recross one another's path, they never meet. They even rest against opposite sides of the same pillar: a variant of the way in which they have been unaware of sharing neighbouring apartments as well.

It begins to rain and each gives up the search. When Jim returns home he places a recording of "Always" on his phonograph. In her apartment, Mary pounds on the wall because someone next door is playing "Always" too loudly on the phonograph. Jim rushes next door to quiet his neighbour and discovers that it is Mary. Happily, they are reunited. And it is their mutual interest in the same object, the song "Always", that brings them finally together.

To a large extent these repetitive patterns in *Lonesome* exist to earn the otherwise improbable resolution. In any event, they are of no interest at all, as patterns, to Jim and Mary. The patterns do manage, however, to insure that an audience is continually aware of what is happening, and has happened, while additionally preparing it, in emotional terms, for the manner of the film's resolution. The discovery that Jim and Mary have shared adjacent apartments all along forces the audience, moreover, to view the film retrospectively since it explains both the arrangement of scenes and the alternating narrative passages that focus on Jim and Mary separately going through similar routines.

With a greater familiarity of these types of narrative structures, a critic is in a much firmer position to interpret the narrative structures of more ambiguous, artist-centred films. Such a descriptive critical analysis as I have outlined here should also help to deal with those numerous studio films that many feel are not quite worthy of analysis.

Marshall Deutelbaum

1 R C Dale, 'René Clair in Hollywood: An Interview', *Film Quarterly*, 20 no 2 (Winter, 1970–71), 37–38.
2 King Vidor, *A Tree is a Tree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1953), p. 272.
3 Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 278.
4 I am indebted to Raymond Durgnat's discussion of this distinction between directorial attitudes in 'Art and Audience', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 10, no 1 (January, 1970), p. 11–24.
5 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 33–34. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967) offers an extended discussion of the reasons why the conclusions to narrative works provide such high degrees of pleasure.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
7 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

Oshima's The Ceremony

THE SPECTACLE OF DECADENCE

Notes on the Vanishing Hero

The latest film of Nagisa Oshima, *The Ceremony* (*Gishiki,* 1971), reintroduces the theme of 'decadence' to the cinema. Through the representation of the decay and self-destruction of a great family from the Japanese upper bourgeoisie. Oshima suggests the analogous historical regression of post-war Japan. Here we shall consider only two elements, in what is one of the most complex and problematical, as well as stylistically refined films, to be made in recent years. The first of these elements is the choice by Oshima, exceptional innovator though he is, of a *classical* language and of a romanesque[1] definition of the characters of the film; and the second is the articulation of the film as a series of *spectacles,* in the form of family ceremonies.

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The choice of a classical narrative style is clearly linked to the 'spectacular' type of structure. It is not to be seen as a concession to the public, which has for a long time become perfectly accustomed to taking in and enjoying old stories in a new stylistic wrapping. Nor is it to be interpreted as a pause on Oshima's part in his pursuit of new expressive techniques which in the past has driven him in a variety of directions with no definite connection between them.[2] It is rather a consequence of the discourse on decadence which dominates the film thematically. This decadence, however, is viewed by an author who does *not* consider himself part of it and can therefore extend its meaning to comprehend all the values represented, whether on a political, family or individual level, and represent them together at their point of convergence, the spectacle of the ceremony.

One is reminded of the scene in *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (*Ensayo de un crimen,* 1955) in which Buñuel represented the marriage of the central character as it was viewed, offscreen, by a trio of pillars of the community, a priest, a general and a bourgeois. The three figures exchanged words of admiration for the sanctity of marriage and for the beauty of the décor of the marriage ceremony. Like his characters, but without their uncritical enthusiasm, Buñuel has constantly reflected on the ceremonies which codify the permanence of a society, with an eye however to the steady and progressive social decomposition which the appearances concealed. Significantly the marriage in *The Criminal Life* ends in murder. More than social and collective decadence Buñuel's theme has been the decadence of ideals. The noisy pop music which accompanies the conclusion of *Viridiana* (1961) and *Simon del desierto* (1965) symbolises the triumph of what the two 'saints' had fought against and is just one more smirk by Buñuel in the direction of the ultra-modern façade of a world that has long reached the point of disintegration. In his old age Buñuel seems to have understood what Oshima also shows signs of seeing, but which is not even hinted at by lots of modern directors, from Godard downwards. *Tristana* (1970), like *Belle de Jour* (1966) before it, regards the catastrophe as *having already happened,* and crystallises its symptoms (physical and moral decay) in a system which has nothing to do with contemporary actuality. But what Buñuel allows to happen to Viridiana, Simon and his other heroes with enlightened ideals has not happened to himself: he has simply adapted his weapon, the cinema, to a society in which prophecies of its own doom serve merely to defer it.

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'... More and more I try not to load my films with moral certitudes... They have become less obvious... Well, this is the direction in which I'm beginning to work. Life is too complicated for facile statements... My opinions today are less cut and dried. There was a time when I thought that neat formulas and clear solutions were justified, but I don't think that way any more. I think it's more important to let people reflect, to examine problems and films, to understand that certain ideas they *hold a priori* just can't be the case, rather than say, 'We must stop making martyrs of children', 'Isn't it awful the way Mexican minorities are exploited', 'Prison conditions are terrible,' or whatever. A lot can be said inside a formula and my old films had a great impact for precisely that reason. They touched people who were concerned, and they've retained that power because people like that still exist, particularly young people. But I think young people should start thinking in a way which is a bit more complex. The world is complex, and if they don't do this they are in danger of being trapped in what I tried to show in *Modesty Blaise,* a mixture of irresponsibility, nihilism, egoism and vulgarity.'[3]

This declaration of Losey, made at the

Minnelli's The Bandwagon

Losey's The Damned

time of *Accident,* helps to clarify, on the one hand, the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes his American from his English period, and on the other hand the meanings of one of his least understood and appreciated films,[4] *Modesty Blaise.* A symbol of the relationship between the two periods of Losey's work can be found in two characters played by Macdonald Carey, in *The Lawless* (1949) and *The Damned (1961).* One should not see the link in terms of an increasing abdication of responsibility.[5] We are dealing rather with a division in terms of a changing context. Whereas the struggle against 'the exploitation of Mexican minorities' could at least claim a partial victory — which makes the hesitations of the journalist Carey even less excusable — the equally individual struggle of Carey the tourist against the atomic threat is merely ridiculous. Losey grants the hero of *The Damned* a gentle end: he thinks he has succeded in escaping, together with the girl, from the last helicopter pursuing him, and he sets out to sea in the motor boat in which he had arrived to spend his holidays, but in reality he is mortally contaminated by radiation. The helicopter looks down on him from above; in the same way a helicopter will strike down Robert Shaw at the end of *Figures in a Landscape* (1970) after he has challenged it, although he was in a position to escape. The struggle becomes more and more unequal with each new film, for Losey, unlike Buñuel and unlike his former collaborator Brecht, believes that this is the real relationship between dominant power and revolutionary-subversive potential. In his latest films, therefore, he devotes himself to delineating the representatives of authority in their moment of absolute splendour. There is no difference between past and present in *The Go-Between* (1971): physical ageing is taking place during the same 'suspended' time of the Edwardian summer.

Rather than the relatively positive parable of *The Servant* (1963), which represents not so much the progressive collapse of the central character as his increasing awareness of the fact of his own collapse, it is the fable of *Modesty Blaise* (1966) which presents the ceremonial of decadence in the form of spectacle. The cartoon-strip characters, the false décors and the trendy colours are objectivised by Losey in the same way as Oshima was to objectify in *The Ceremony* the false splendour of family reunions. In the midst of a global moral disaster the defeat of the super-criminal Gabriel (Dirk Bogarde) in *Modesty Blaise* demonstrates ironically that the reversal of the status quo consists solely in a descent into the abyss of mass culture, with Gabriel bound and forced to listen to trashy music on a transistor radio while calling vainly 'Champagne, Champagne!'

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Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930), like Losey's *The Servant,* seems at first sight to take as its theme the decadence of the central character and of his social class. But in reality Professor Rat (Emil Jannings) thanks to the beneficient (and not evil) effects of his infatuation with the singer is able gradually to open his eyes to an unknown reality. It is not the loss of his Prussian ideals but the discovery that they have long faded away from the historical scene that will bring about his death. According to Sternberg's autobiography,[6] he used this character to get his revenge on one of his schoolteachers. This Freudian motivation, together with his reiterated opposition to any influence of contingent external reality in his films, leads us to take at face value Sternberg's dismissal of people who see sociological connections in *The Blue Angel.* Even in his first, and most 'social' film, *The Salvation Hunters* (1925), the characters were mere abstractions, the dramatic situations pure allegories and material objects touchstones of truth. Nonetheless he too is the poet of a decadence which is irremediable, and external to his films. As the character of Marlene's former husband, sunk to the role of clown who never laughs, reveals in *The Blue Angel,* the 'fall' is cyclical and Marlene is the agent who provokes it. Even in *The Last Command* (1928), the humiliation and death of the Russian Grand-Duke (Emil Jannings) when he comes to Hollywood, have as their 'agent' a director of Russian origin revenging himself on a former enemy. In this film Sternberg portrays a 'class struggle', whose aim is a reversal of marxist principles: the Grand-Duke's heroic death, although a product of exaggerated cinematic invention, leaves the plebeian director shattered and wide-eyed. The dialectic of redemption through a final gesture does not however save Sternberg from a profound scepticism: his description of Hollywood at the beginning of *The Last Command* is one of the blackest that the American cinema has ever produced, a sure sign that he understood fully from what situation his messages in a bottle had to be sent out.

The theme of the 'decadence of Hollywood', which has recently been taken up by directors who have neither lived it nor understood it, like Agnés Varda or Michelangelo Antonioni, has received serious treatment in two films of Minnelli, *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), which focus respectively on Hollywood itself and Hollywood-on-Tiber, alias Rome. The latter film makes explicit references to the former, and furthermore the hero of them both, Kirk Douglas, symbolises, through his own decline from omnipotent producer to failed alcoholic actor, the decline of the Hollywood film industry. Minnelli registers this from the inside, since he has been a part of it and maybe feels himself to a certain degree responsible. More subtle is his treatment of the question of the musical in *The Band Wagon* (1952). At the beginning of the film Fred Astaire plays himself as he was in the early fifties, a great showman with a prodigious past who is attempting a come-back. The 'Faustian' musical in which he finds himself unwillingly involved is overcome by a hasty return to the classic American tradition and its most conventional folklore motifs. The final triumph of Astaire and his show is therefore a warning addressed both to the wave of 'European' intellectualism caricaturated in the figure of the director Jeffrey Cordova (played by Jack Buchanan) and to the public's forgetfulness towards the stars of the past. But the triumphant ending of this as of so many other film musicals has no motive other than in the obligatory optimism of the genre. As we have seen *The Band Wagon* represents and contains in itself the germs of the very disease it tries to exorcise: old age, the neglect of tradition, the incomprehension of the public.

It could be maintained that it is the archetypal musical, the show that shows a show being put on, which has become the most significant ceremony in the cinema in the west over the last 30 years. In Oshima's film, *The Ceremony,* the scene in which the sumptuous marriage of the

central character is carried on in the absence of the bride, with everyone behaving as if she were there, recalls the good old command 'The show must go on!' and even the solitary dances of Astaire or Kelly when their partner is away. This indicates why it is that musicals, like ritualised ceremony, need the presence of all the actors ('Tous en scène' aptly is the French title of *The Band Wagon*) but survive as pure 'forms' when one or all the participants are absent.

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Consciousness of decadence and of the coming of the end, whether individual or social, as exemplified by Chaplin (Calvero) in *Limelight* (1952), receives a representation by transference in the character of the dancer who wants to commit suicide (Claire Bloom). The death from which Calvero saves her and the life and the art which he gives are values susceptible of transmission because, in Chaplin's version, the younger generation is simply *a little more* desperate than the old. *Limelight,* like *The Band Wagon,* is a film full of positive and constructive ideas, but seems to believe in them hardly at all. Whereas in his silent comic films he started with a surreal character thrown into the middle of a social reality which few other directors of his day dared to represent, everything in *Limelight* is deliberately 'theatrical' and the war which breaks out is nothing but an artifice of the narrative. The speech at the end of *The Great Dictator,* when Chaplin removes the mask to address the public, and usually interpreted as a great hymn to human and democratic values, was also a way of registering the failure to have any grip on the enormity of real events. Even Chaplin's progress from crazy comedy to drama with the occasional, isolated 'comic' moments (as in *Limelight*) indicates an increasing lack of faith in the well-aimed custard pie as a political weapon.

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The most 'scenic' and unreal sequence in *The Ceremony* is that of the suicide of the sole heir of the great family, whose gesture represents the self-destruction of his entire house. Oshima chooses for the scene the same violent red tonality which is the chromatic characteristic of Visconti's *The Damned* (*La caduta degli dei,* 1969). Visconti's film also ends with a ceremonial suicide, that of Friedrich and Sophie (Dirk Bogarde and Ingrid Thulin) after the marriage staged for them by the Nazis. Visconti, through the character of Martin, his incest with his mother and the organisation of her marriage and suicide, prophesies the rise of new gods, freed from bonds of kinship. Where Oshima uses the suicide of the young heir to endorse the end of the dominant class, Visconti shows it simply undergoing a change of function and behaviour. Even in *Death in Venice* (1971) the 'prophecy' is limited to the past. Visconti makes his own the philosophy expressed in *The Leopard* of 'everything changes and everything remains the same'. Death, fall and decay represent an act of faith on Visconti's part that decadence is an infinite process.

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The passing of time and of the seasons which creates 'naturally' the myth of a golden past, such as we find in Minnelli's *Meet Me in Saint Louis* (1944), can be contrasted with Fellini's antithetical vision in *Roma* (1972), for which *any* past is golden given the misery of the present. Fellini certainly idealises that past less than either Visconti or Minnelli, but he opposes to it a hyper-negative present and in this way the past becomes a Garden of Eden and what it is open for us to feel today is... nostalgia. The fact that Fellini in his film makes himself the only point of reference, whether as individual or as history, and that he shuns any form of non-subjective representation, allows us almost to enter directly into his dreams and nightmares. The Rome which he dreamed of as a child, which he then encountered as a young man and which he no longer either understands or accepts, is a macroscopic symbol which fails however to resolve the triple problem of decadence — who decays and who evolves and who stays the same.

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A possible reply to all three questions is: spectacle. Like art, spectacle cannot be defined simply as a social outlet, a function, but is on the other hand the collective testament of individual suicide. This is why *The Ceremony* takes as its starting point, and continues to revolve around, the telegram of the victim who announces his own death: 'Terumichi dead Stop Terumichi'. The presentation of suicide as spectacle transcends the links with the Japanese tradition of *hara-kiri* and is transformed into an affirmation of the value of 'forms' after and beyond the disappearance of the actors.[7]

Even in the last shot of the film, which comes after the suicide of the heir and his wife, Oshima makes the spectacle continue. The central character, left alone, and possibly having gone mad, begins playing baseball as he did when he was a child, but with imaginary companions and without bat or ball. In a sense his 'regression' is a sort of happy ending, like the ending of many recent films, such as *The Arrangement, Charles mort ou vif, McCabe and Mrs Miller* or *Dillinger is Dead,* in which the characters who succeed in spite of everything in staying alive give themselves over to an unconscious ecstasy of release, resembling happiness. As actors, they escape into the role of spectators — which is our cue to leave.

Lorenzo Codelli

translated by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

1 [Translator's Note] The Italian word 'romanzesco' ('romanesque' in French) which means, roughly, 'novel-like', 'of the novel', has no equivalent in English. Since it is useful word for a language to have we have rendered it by its French equivalent.

2 Mixture of documentary and fiction in *Tokyo Senso Sengo Hiwa (Secret Story of Post-War Tokyo,* 1970); dreams, theatre and life in *Shinjuko Dorobo Nikki (Diary of a Shinjuku Thief,* 1968); theatre of the absurd and theatre of cruelty in *Koshikei (Death by Hanging,* 1968); static comic-strip technique in *Ninja Bugeicho (Band of Ninja,* 1966); non-chronological realism in *Hakuchu No Torima (Violence at Noon,* 1966); stills in *Yunbogi No Nikki (Diary of Yunbogi,* 1965); etc.

3 Joseph Losey, taken from an interview with Bernard Eisenschitz in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* No 184, November 1966 [retranslated from the French].

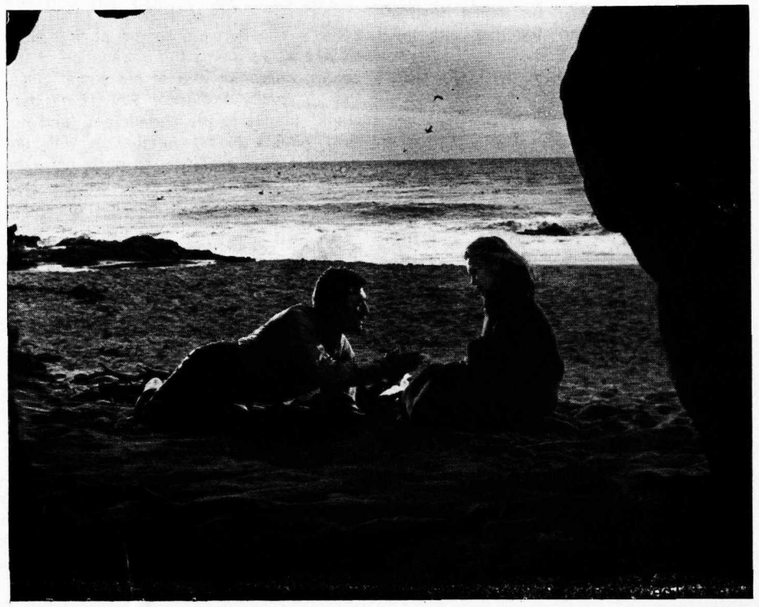
4 An exception is Raymond Durgnat in *Cinema* (Cambridge), No 1, December 1968.

5 As is claimed by James Leahy in *The Cinema of Joseph Losey,* Zwemmer, 1967, p. 104.

6 *Fun in a Chinese Laundry,* Secker and Warburg, 1965, p. 7.

7 Kobayashi's film on hara-kiri as an instrument of religious and social oppression, *Seppuku* (1963), takes an opposite attitude to that of Oshima, who represents it in almost exalted tones.

Kazan's The Arrangement: *Kirk Douglas and Faye Dunaway*



Book Review

SIRK ON SIRK

By JON HALLIDAY

Cinema One
Secker & Warburg, London, 1971

Interviews, and even more so, interview books with movie directors are pretty risky affairs. For one thing, they almost invariably strike the wrong note, either to solemn or too flippant — both perfectly understandable pitfalls if one thinks of the situation. Imagine a director, especially if he is one of Hollywood's old guard, working in an industry which until recently couldn't give a damn about a director's public image, let alone his artistic integrity, and putting whatever talent and energy he had into the careful nurture of an indirect, oblique way of saying and doing what he thought important, suddenly being asked to talk about his films in a language that, even if he uses it at home, would have made him look a fool on every set in every studio.

Confronted with the keen earnestness of a movie buff and long-suffering admirer, such a director is in a dilemma, and some of them have evidently considered being interviewed too gratifying an experience, after years of neglect and misunderstanding, not to show a certain polite willingness to play along with the interviewer. Others instinctively display a total refusal to yield, even for a second, to the temptation of becoming — in public at least — fans of their own work and instead use the occasion for letting off a firework of well-rehearsed anecdotes and more or less pungent irrelevancies. Interviews seem to depend on the interviewer getting the level right: Hitchcock and Preminger are masters at making monkeys of their journalist admirers, and Bogdanovich has missed the mark three times, even though with Ford and Lang at any rate he was interviewing directors whose experience, intelligence and, finally, charitable nature has prevented anything associated with their names from being a total disaster.

What is it, moreover, that a moderately intelligent and informed critic can hope to get out of having his favourite directors in the flesh? It is hardly wise to expect them to confirm one's pet theories or interpretations, especially when they are well-founded and penetrating. Clarification of historical facts and data, then — of who got credited for the screenplay though he was sacked after three days, of how terribly the producer mangled the release version after the director's final cut had already been approved, or what a charming fellow X was to work with provided he was given enough liquor within the first hour's shooting to keep him drunk for the rest of the day. This is often good stuff to read and probably ought to have a place somewhere on record, but it hardly clinches the case for a director's *films* — which is what interview books are unfortunately called upon to do these days while film-criticism is still in such bad shape.

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In the abence of a really worthwhile study, an interview book is therefore always in danger of becoming a promotion exercise, however well-meant, and can show the auteur-theory at its most questionable, because in this country, underdeveloped as it is in respect to film-culture, the machinery of book-publishing almost inevitably creates a cult and with it, an unhelpful polarity of cult- and anti-cultists, and also because it gives an unfair advantage to the articulate 'intentionalists' over the more reticent or inarticulate 'réalisateurs' among directors. It is unfortunately too easy to make even Mike Nichols' movies look good on paper.

The more fervent one's hopes for an interview-book about a director who really is outstanding *and* neglected as far as the critical establishment goes. But not only does *Sirk on Sirk* dispel one's apprehensions whether a good director can look after himself in an interview, because Sirk most certainly can, the book is the nearest thing to a vindication of interviews as a valid form of film-criticism, leaving aside the rather unique case of the Hitchcock/Truffaut venture, with which it otherwise invites comparison. What makes Halliday's book special to my mind is that it is at once too level-headed in its approach, too comprehensive in the intellectual framework it sets up, too modest in its claims and pretensions to present any danger of easy assimilation of Sirk's work and personality. This may sound a strange recommendation and curious praise indeed, but Sirk is a difficult director for a high-brow audience, not to say a challenge, even to the Hitchcock-Hawks faction, and it is only right that one faces up to it.

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The fact that (because Sirk hadn't seen most of his films for a decade or more) the interviews deal rather less with scenes and shots in individual films and more with Sirk's cultural background, his approach to Hollywood subjects, and the relation of the material conditions — scripts, actors, producers, studios — to what a director can hope to achieve with so many variables on his hands proves to be an asset, because it invites one to ponder the hiatus that seems to separate the pictures' manifest concerns from the mind that created them. The book shows a director at work who knows he has to devise aesthetic strategies in order to tackle the problems that the material presents as *material*, because he has responded to it not in terms of literary criteria derived from his own cultural tastes, but because he obviously respected whatever sentimental and imaginative experience was encapsuled in the kind of American lore that Hollywood was dedicated to transmitting. This characterizes Sirk's attitude to the melodrama, and the book is perhaps most interesting where it raises questions about why and with what justification complex high-brow aesthetic effects and the techniques of serious drama are applied to undeniably low-brow and even pulp material, which — rightly or not — enjoys the emotional allegiance of millions. Sirk makes it quite clear that 'mass-entertainment' need neither be escapist nor vulgar, though it may seem to deal only with commonplaces. 'You have to do your utmost to hate it — and to love it', Sirk says about the story-material he was given for *Magnificent Obsession,* and he goes on to explain, that 'if I had had to stage *Magnificent Obsession* as a play I wouldn't have survived. It is a combination of kitsch, and craziness and trashiness. This is the dialectic — there is a very short distance between high art and trash, and trash that contains the element of craziness is by this very quality nearer to art.'

Sirk as a director has excelled in keeping this distance always in mind, in fact, maintaining that degree of direct involvement and intellectual detachment necessary not just to function and survive under Hollywood conditions (for a long period he was exposed to the worst of these conditions) but to come out with at least half a dozen unquestionable masterpieces which show that he understood Hollywood almost better than it understood itself, and in his films the idiom is so perfect not least because it is a consciously acquired one. This gift for empathy, the cultural pragmatism in Sirk — what Sarris has called his willingness for 'direct confrontation of all material, however fanciful or improbable' — comes over very strongly in the book and makes it exactly right in tone, as well as an invaluable aid to situating a highly intellectual approach to picture-making (as Sirk's undoubtedly is) within an industry notorious for its anti-intellectualism. But it also provides a salutary corrective to the notion, still touted around as if it were self-evident, that Orson Welles was the only director of intelligence and culture who ever set foot inside Hollywood, and look what happened to him. Sirk is not alone in proving that the problem is a little more complex, and that intelligence or culture probably has very little to do with the vexing question whether Hollywood was great because of its directors or its directors were great because of Hollywood.

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To mention Welles, however, is not entirely out of context, because he shared with Sirk a similar belief that melodrama was the last form of tragedy in a bourgeois world and could be made an instrument of social critique. But Welles, even in his most deliberate 'genre' pictures, such as *The Magnificent Ambersons, The Stranger, The Lady from Shanghai* or *Touch of Evil* often tried rather hard not to let down his cultured background, by turning on an irony too brittle for him ever to become a director of popular pictures (if there is one thing that doesn't go down well with American audiences, it would seem to be the dry, unmistakeably cerebral tone of mockery and self-mockery so noticeable in Welles' pictures following *Citizen Kane).* Sirk after initally working in a similar vein of sophisticated irony (cf *Scandal in Paris*) quickly realis-

ed that this was not the way to get at and to the American public within the same type of movie.

This is why the book quite rightly stresses what otherwise appears a rather too exalted ancestry for even the best of Hollywood directors — Sophocles, Lope de Vega, Molière, Shakespeare: Sirk understood himself to be, or rather worked consciously towards becoming a director with a materialist approach to his art, that is, of working dialectically inside what he knows to be his audience's expectations and demands, his conditions of production, and the possibilities of his chosen medium, thereby giving that much less importance to the artistic persona and to self-expression. And this attitude Sirk sees as being in the tradition of the great European popular drama: 'I became a kind of house director of Universal. Conditions were not perfect, but when I complained about a story, they would say to me "If you can get a star, great; you can have more money and pick a better story". But at least I was allowed to work on the material — so that I restructured to some extent some of the rather impossible scripts of the films I had to direct. Of course, I had to go by the rules, avoid experiments, stick to family fare, have "happy endings", and so on. Universal didn't interfere with either my camerawork or my cutting — which meant a lot to me. In a way, I did see their point of view, running a studio: a film has to make back its money . . . I think if Shakespeare were alive today he'd shake me by the hand and say "My dear boy, I know what it was like in Hollywood, I had to make money too, and a lot of my stories were lousy" — which they were.' And again: 'Even in plays it isn't the story that is important: if you think of all the silly plots Shakespeare had, and compare him with Walter Soctt . . . it's language that counts. Now the place of language in pictures has to be taken by the camera — and by cutting.'

Similarly, when he talks about Euripides or *El Alcade de Zalamea* by Calderon and how they solved 'the apparent contradiction between an impossible situation and the need for a happy end' by the 'crude shocking manner' of the *deus ex machina,* and asserts that this is the perfect pattern for melodrama with a critical edge, one can see immediately how it is relevant to his own film-making: at least two of his movies contain exactly this kind of ending, and both thereby emphasize the tragic accents of the situation rather than weakening them. In *Shockproof* and *All I Desire* (two pictures on which he had studio interference) Sirk resorted to obviously 'staged', explicit yet quite unmotivated reversals whereby in almost identical terms the villain, after having been shot by the heroine, not only does not die but 'forgives' or 'confesses' so as to smooth the path for the lovers. Playing it tough right down the line and then jerking the plot out of its inevitably tragic groove is in the last instance probably less sentimental than the tragic ending which high-brow audiences seem to crave, and it is perhaps not an accident that the other Hollywood master of this kind of volte-face dramaturgy is also a German with a distinctly 'classical' background, namely Fritz Lang (cf. *Fury, Woman in the Window, Beyond A Reasonable Doubt*), whose scenarios of fatality and tragic vision have been so much more readily accepted than those of the less vertiginously Pirandellian but equally subversive Sirk.

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It is at this point that I am most inclined to take issue with Halliday, in that he seems rather too anxious to give this subversive side in Sirk's work an implicitly Marxist flavouring — an interpretation he admittedly does not press, but which, when the issue does crop up, as in the discussion of *Battle Hymn,* he should perhaps have pressed a bit further, because seeing how little Sirk is inclined to agreeing with Halliday on why the film didn't come off (and giving, incidentally, an extremely pertinent explanation as to why the American cinema cannot easily make a distinction between a morally and a politically ambiguous situation), one suspects a greater divergence of opinion on the subject of left-wing politics and its relation to art than the book as a whole suggests. Now, there is no reason why, if such a divergence does exist, it should be discused in a book of this kind, and there are very good reason why in practice it isn't. And I may be labouring the point only because there has been a recent tendency among some film critics (though Halliday doesn't normally belong to them, as can be seen from his article on Rossellini in *Monogram* no 2) who want to rescue the directors they like not only aesthetically, but politically as well. To rewrite one's preference for, say, Fuller, or Ford, or Welles in the language of post-'68's *Cahiers du Cinéma,* designed explicitly to do away with auteurs and films as we know them, is not merely a case of wanting to have one's cake and choke on it, but also a form of mystification that English film criticism at this juncture can well do without. It betrays little confidence in either one's aesthetic judgement or one's political convictions — or for that matter, one's intelligence, — if they are so threatened that one needs an ideological pass-card before it's ok to like something and explain why.

It would be quite unjustifiable to bring up this point in connexion with Halliday's book, if it were not that precisely the still from *Battle Hymn* has a totally misleading caption, which, though probably meant as an in-joke for the benefit of those who have seen the movie, comes too near an act of bad faith for it to have stayed in and not leave a lingering doubt, especially in a book that as far as its documentation, annotation and research go, is a model of accuracy and painstaking care —so much so that one feels Halliday's admiration and love for Sirk's pictures has been, as it were, sublimated out of the text and gone as a kind of homage into the impeccable presentation.

*

Clearly, Sirk as he emerges from *Sirk on Sirk* is a man of the left, even if he isn't necessarily of the new left. His theatre-work during the Weimar Republic, the resolutely anti-Nazi stand in the 'thirties, his disillusionment with West-Germany's restauration since the war, his comments on America during the McCarthy era and the Vietnam war today, make this quite evident. But equally apparent, what interests him in his pictures is above all cultural decadence and moral ambiguity, 'bourgeois' subjects par excellence, which make him comparable to another left-winger of long standing, Joseph Losey. As a 'stylist', and as his frame compositions and use of images show, Sirk was influenced by theories of metaphor and symbolism derived from German romanticism, French *fin-de-siècle* and the teachings of Erwin Panofsky, as well as by Reinhardtian theatrical mise-en-scene and the pictorial values of expressionist stage-technique. With his training in the German classics and his thorough grasp of the dramatic structures of Greek tragedy, he is squarely within a recognizably German tradition of philosophical and aesthetic idealism, refined and at the same time tempered by having come into contact with the tough 'aristocratic' melancholy in the early, and the strident self-assertion of Germany in the late 'twenties, complemented subsequently by the equally tough self-reliance and stridently dynamic materialism of America. Sirk's ability to approach philosophically, or as one would say today 'theorize' the implications of his material keeps his pictures together even when they seem to be about 'trashy' subjects, because his education had provided him with a happy blend of German expressionism articulated through (but also held in check by) an unfailing reliance on the solid structures of classical drama, which — in the context of the subjects he was treating — acted as both reference point and distancing device.

His melodramas are thus the ruses of German idealism, which so often kept its hold on concrete reality by exposing itself to 'low-brow' culture-shocks, by a morality insisting on failure as inevitable, and by elaborating a mode of dramatic presentation, though perhaps parasitic on the society that supported classical art (and inevitably tried to emasculate, assimilate and exploit it), but which was also critical because it turned the expressionist emotional stance (what Sirk himself calls 'the craziness') against bourgeois rationality, hypocrisy and the pressures to conform. Having historicised and come to terms with the cynicism and stylishness of Weimar Germany (the very marks of a discredited idealist position), Sirk could fit himself rather well into Hollywood with its emphasis on style, the spectacle, and its endless toying with the discredited moral idealism of the American dream. If *Zu Neuen Ufern,* Sirk's most accomplished German film, makes one aware of how 'American' the German cinema was just before its collapse, *Written on the Wind* and *The Tarnished Angels* are in a strange sense the last *fleurs du mal* of German expressionism and Weimar culture.

Thomas Elsaesser

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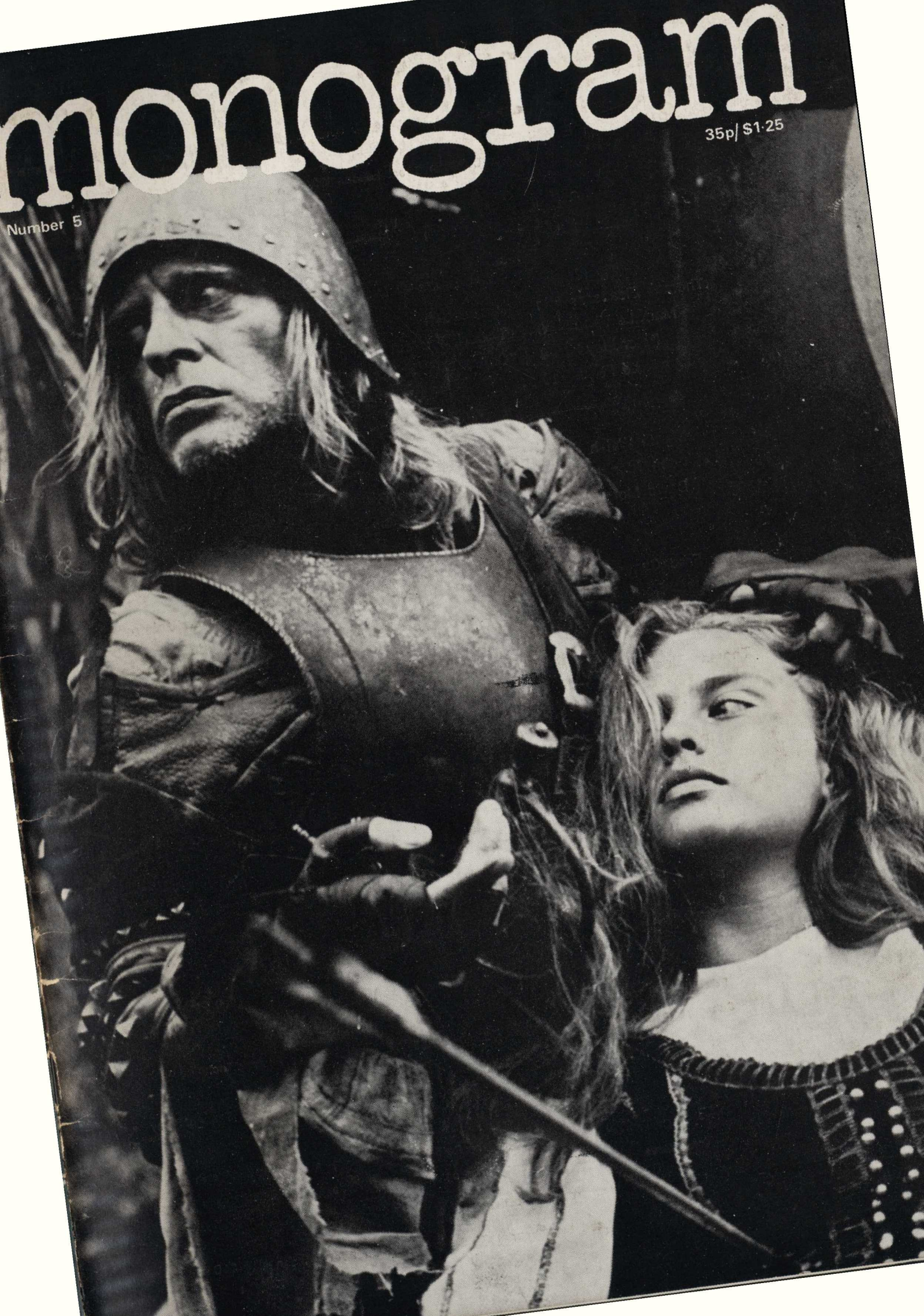

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EDITORIAL

The Cinema of Irony

LIMITATIONS OF CLASSICAL NARRATIVE

Specific about contemporary film-making is that the distrust of the spectacle — nagging doubts about presenting as logic a purely aesthetic causality — has produced misgivings about the status and function of fictions (their ontology and their ideology: what reality and especially whose reality do they codify as verisimilitude?). Films that have any claims to truth have to battle with the difficulty or not assuming any kind of a-priori correspondence between the universe of fictionality (in which a film necessarily moves) and the world (of which it necessarily represents the external appearances). Whereas at one time this manifested itself in a self-conscious stance that owed much to the Godard of the 'sixties and reminded the spectator of just how contrived and fragile a construct he was watching, film-makers now tend to draw attention to their labour, their own intervention in the signifying and representational act by rather more indirect means; in almost all cases the stance is one of ironic 'as-if': holding the fiction at arm's length. When I say irony, it has to be understood not only in its limited sense of puncturing inflated pretensions and making assertions tongue-in-cheek, but also in a more technical sense. It names all the strategies of displacement, distanciation, detachment — verbal, visual, structural — whereby a statement, a message, a communication, image or action may be qualified, put in question, subverted, parodied or indeed wholly negated *while preserving visible that to which it refers itself ironically*. As such, irony is dialectical in intention and invariably points out a potentially significant gap or break between the signifier and the signified.

DOCUMENTARY IRONY: HERZOG

In practice, this covers a very wide range. It may be that the irony is in the plot, but carefully embedded in a *neutral delivery*, and *underplayed* to the point where it becomes a slow-burn verging on oblique ambiguity, as in the recent films of Tanner or Goretta. It may even embrace two totally opposed kinds of cinema — say, that of Werner Herzog, where the fiction (not in the form of a plot, but as a series of 'what happens if' propositions) only intermittently rises from a documentary flow — and Chabrol's cinema, where the plot foregrounds itself into almost operatic theatricality. What unites the extremes is a radical de-dramatization of naturalistic action, an intellectualization of montage which lets the image in its unmediated presence hover, as it were, over the possibilities of precise or remote signification. In the work of Herzog the scenes are dissolved into 'moments', discrete, suspended, before they become opaque and solidify into blocks, harsh and unaccommodating in their un-metaphoric, un-symbolic facticity: they are actuality material without the action. The more these moments — often extremely comic, grotesque or pathetic — are presented with the factual neutrality of the botanist, the more they charge themselves with potential meaning, that is, the less unlinear and causally deterministic is the direction of their significance within the overall structure and flow. For Herzog these moments, intensely poetic — a horse slipping off a raft in *Aguirre*, or an uprooted palm-tree catching fire in *Even Dwarfs* — are the epiphanies rewarding the film-maker when lying patiently in wait for a reality that is simply and profoundly itself — before it can be absorbed into semantically determined contexts and thus reduced to its functionality.

CHABROL AND 'EXCESSIVE' NARRATIVE

At the opposite end stands Chabrol. If Herzog is on the side of the signified and engaged in preserving its pristine irreducability, Chabrol is all on the side of the signifier, demonstrating the pervasiveness of 'language' in the realm of objects, motivations, passions and emotions. Films like *Le Boucher* or *La Décade Prodigieuse*, especially the former with its strongly linear, suspense-orientated plot, has so many carefully composed symmetrical patterns overlaying and deflecting the momentum of the story-line that one is tempted to talk about a counter-structure of visual and verbal motifs superimposing itself on the movements of the intrigue. The effect is to make the narrative more discursive, but also more explicitly an artifice. Here, as with other directors such as Skolimowski, the combination of formalism and detachment intends to apostrophize and interrogate the logic generating a visual pattern: a situation is created where the spectator can catch from the discontinuities of the narrative a glimpse of a rebus-picture of another fiction hidden in the foliage of the conventional plot.

FICTIONAL WORLDS: TANNER & ROHMER

Yet perhaps the most striking characteristic today, and one that unites an uncommonly large number of otherwise quite distinct films is the way fiction-making itself in one form or another is presented as a moral and emotional hazard, and as such is taken into the film to become the constitutive element of the intrigue, its secret theme and *raison d'être*. There, the fiction 'en abime' carves out of the material the ironic space, the reduplication, where the lines of meaning, as if traversing a prism, build up a new narrative architecture; irony, underscored or deadpan, chisels away emotion, identification. dramatic assertion or any other form of complicity between spectator, protagonists and director, to lay bare the outlines of a visual structure owing nothing to either novel or drama.

A good example of a film where the fiction-making is attributed to the protagonists is *Le Salamandre*. Tanner, by choosing as his hero a writer who wants to play the journalist-detective, sets up a mechanism inside the film which generates the action, as if by itself, almost on behalf of the director, who is free to step back and observe his clockwork-trap. The writer and his friend, in their effort to make of the girl a protagonist in *their* story, bring out in the 'subject' motivations and reactions which plainly and painfully elude any fictional pattern they attempt to impose: the girl is too real, she doesn't respect the boundaries that should separate (and protect) the teller from the tale. Tanner can let the 'reality' spill over into the 'fiction' and vice versa without apparently becoming himself guilty of the charge he levels against his heroes by an ingenious yet open-ended structure of ironic reversals and come-uppances which relativize and dissipate any fixed position. Thus, the increasing isolation of the girl in her own world of private (though socially induced) obsessive fantasy — she, too, is fiction-bound — adds another contrapuntal structure, and Tanner makes his presence felt while remaining studiously detached and 'objective'. The film-maker, engaged in a quest for the real, cannot manifest his commitment other than by emphatically disclaiming responsibility for the fiction, and pointing to the significance of his gesture by a heavy authorial silence: his irony becomes the guarantee of his sincerity, and the film, sustained by paradox, the neutral tone and a strategy of reversals, parallels and counterpoints, assumes a degree of autonomy that is clearly the product of but does not depend on a *a-priori* conception of where the film is going, or what it intends to say.

Tanner is on comparatively safe ground. His film does not push its ideology beyond the assumption that reality is a complex and relative affair, to be approached only by way of possibly self-defeating bridges thrust into the unknown. Not quite the same applies to Eric Rohmer, who also tends to place his characters in situations which make them objects of other people's designs: a relationship takes shape, out of this air, at first toyed as a pleasing conceit. The hero enters into what he takes to be the spirit of the occasion; this soon reveals an existential and moral basechord. It insinuates itself as a veritable obsession, and he has no other choice than to step into the role held out with teasing ingenuousness by his female antagonist. The challenge accepted, he comes dangerously near to losing his balance, but just scrapes through back to the status quo, but characteristically on terms that make his a pyrrhic victory, leaving him and his values bare, hollow and exposed. From one moral tale to the next, Rohmer remains faithful to the pattern: *La Collectioneuse, Ma Nuit Chez Maude, Le Genou de Claire, L'Amour L'Après-Midi*. What changes is not the

constellation, nor the nature of the game, but the circumstantial forces that void the hero of his moral and emotional substance. Never, however, are these forces identified with 'reality' as such. Rohmer's strategy is to let one provocation (and being a complacent bourgeois is provocation enough) fight another; only limited, self-interested views are allowed to intersect in a discourse that does not demand of Rohmer to declare himself, because the action shapes its trajectory according to the ironic (and thus structurally satisfying) logic of the pyrrhic victory. Yet Rohmer's morality is not only a convenient device to hold the narrative in ambiguous suspension: however charming and engaging his heroes are, he does not disguise the fact that their playing games with each other is the result of moral cowardice for sure, but also of being idle, rich and blasé, which makes their gestures parables of irresponsibility and the film a run-through in each case of what kind of dissatisfaction makes the bourgeoisie flirt with change, almost accept the Pascalian wager and then in a flurry of barely suppressed hysteria, run for cover. Sophistication and elegance, finesse and esprit are, so it seems, the products of a vacuum. It is this vacuum that Rohmer's ironic aloofness reproduces on a stylistic plane, and it has to stand for the protest that the moral pessimist in him does not dare to manifest against reality as it is lived. In his aesthetic, he would probably like to think of himself as a disciple of Fritz Lang, another wily pessimist, particularly in the way he allows chance and contingency to bring about the ironic implosions on which his stories hinge. Fate (the secret architect of the plot) intervenes not on the side of fictionality to tidy up the pattern, but in order to tip the scales in favour of apparent incoherence, the accidental, the unpredictable and incommensurate. It is the hero who in his cocksureness thinks he has it all worked out. For Rohmer, too, the world is unknowable, but it needs fiction to demonstrate it.

THE BRESSONIAN HERO

By contrast, Bresson in a film like *Four Nights of A Dreamer* gives the struggle of the solipsist with his life-denying fantasies a much more sombre colour of obsession and destructive intensity, possibly because he is not willing to abandon his hero for the mechanisms of ironic detachment that can juggle opposites and come down on the side of the 'real' or the contingent *against* the hero, and thus expose to ridicule his obstinate pride, as always in Bresson the sign of a problematic but inalienable and utterly personal spirituality. For Bresson the world is not unknowable, nor are his heroes the sum-total of their own and other people's projections. His grim *avoidance of irony* in structure and tone, despite a meticulously understated narrative diction might give a clue to the impulse that lies behind treating the fictionality of life and the life-likeness of fiction in the ironic mode: it tends to divest the individual of his pretensions to an autonomous self and to dislodge an anthropomorphic, psychocentric view of reality — without thereby committing itself to any other view of reality.

All these films, however ingeniously they articulate with the fictional situation the hesitancy of their directors about its validity, do present themselves as artefacts which are self-contained structures, objects out there, even if this 'out there' plainly does not wish to be mistaken for the 'real world'. Nonetheless, they exist in their suspended realm by a logic of their own and therefore need the *presence of an audience only to recoup* their finance at the box-office.

What I mean is this: clearly, they make no direct emotional appeal towards identification, as does the classic Hollywood film whose structure is geared towards generating psychological impulses and reactions from the audience. Irony and pointedly neutral observation as a matter of course impose on the spectator a more intellectual response of cautious and wary interest as befitting an object of uncertain status and meaning. Yet however refracted and fragmented the action is terms of what is 'real' and what may be assumed to be 'in the characters heads', it is nonetheless possible to construct the outlines of an internal coherence and correspondence of parts for the films of someone like Rohmer. Even though this coherence does not denote reality, it stands as a metaphor for objective, autonomous existence, in its very density and capacity ontologically separated from the audience.

BUNUEL

Among the things that makes *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* the most interesting film in this context, is that here the audience is thought into the very structure and thereby Bunuel seems to open within the same thematic perimeter of fiction and reality the possibility of a non-idealist dialectic. He, too, attributes to his protagonists the fictions and fragments of stories and dreams that make up his film, identified as the recurrent, obsessive fantasies — some psychologically plausible, others quite oblique, of people with a masochistic, manic strain. A bourgeoisie, more and more openly disgusted with itself is waiting for a kind of apocalyptic deliverance that fails to materialize. However outrageous their behaviour, it is tolerated, because of the guilty secrets they share together, as members of the same class. In fact, most of the time, they seem like conspirators, hatching childish plots. But if they are truants from life, as it were, their cool, insolent, urbane style makes them very good company (for themselves and for us): they typify the glamorous and compelling appeal of the cinema as spectacle, and their brazen hedonism and escapism parodies that of the spectator. It is significant that Bunuel chases them onto the road, into no-man's land; their pilgrimage is not even in search of the whore that awaited the vagrants at the end of *La Voie Lactée.*

Which must leave the spectator wondering where the film is taking him. The images convey the substance of their representation (it can hardly be called a story) only by seeming to detach themselves from the screen itself; the plot breaks and peels off like flaky paint, the narrative coils up upon itself, because it always turns out to be that of a dream from which someone is trying to wake up. As it unwinds, the film is revolving around an absent centre, and it projects itself on what is unmistakeably a blank space at the horizon of the fictional world, which the spectator must eventually confront on his own, unaided, uncomforted by the director. One is tempted to say that the film has a structure that collapses unless supported by the spectators' effort to sort it out in his own mind: he is that centre and he completes the circularity of an action that has no real beginning or end.

An exemplary 'deconstruction' of fictional realism, therefore, because the empty space (psychologically) and the stretch of country road (visually) are the film's basic situations on which its fictions come to rest, but as such, these are signs that negate. The road, on which the characters shamble along or walk briskly without making any headway connotes the journey, mythical or otherwise, whereby linear narratives travel towards climax and resolution. In its desolation it functions as a reminder that dramatic action, structured plots, motivation must not be expected of a film, nor from these stranded individuals, who like unwilling survivors of Godard's cataclysmic *Weekend* are on this road creatures from another world. The cinema is not reality, and stars are not people.

DIALECTICAL CINEMA

The dialectic inaugurated by Bunuel indicates one direction in which the refusal to render a self-contained fictional world in the cinema can take the filmmaker beyond merely asserting a sceptical relativism. A rapport of productivity between spectator and film will have to replace the structures of complicity, so that the spectator's expectations, his anticipated gratifications, even where they are disappointed, frustrated in the interest of cognition that does not proceed by recognition and confirmation, returns to him as potential energy to be reinvested in the film as active labour towards the production of meaning. A cinema that intervenes through irony and discontinuity would seem the first step towards creating open structures, spaced narratives, whose value would depend on the urgency and success with which they appeal to the spectator's desire to complete a pattern and establish for himself an understanding that makes sense. In this lies his vulnerability, but also his potential productivity. By exercising it he might learn to treat fictions not as substitutes for reality, but as the means of apprehending it. If it is the case that even outside the cinema he apprehends it as a tissue of false realities and false needs, then what better way than the cinema of 'fiction' to demonstrate — and perhaps fight — the fatal logic of this process?

THOMAS ELSAESSER

The Cinema of Irony

Chabrol, Truffaut in the 1970's

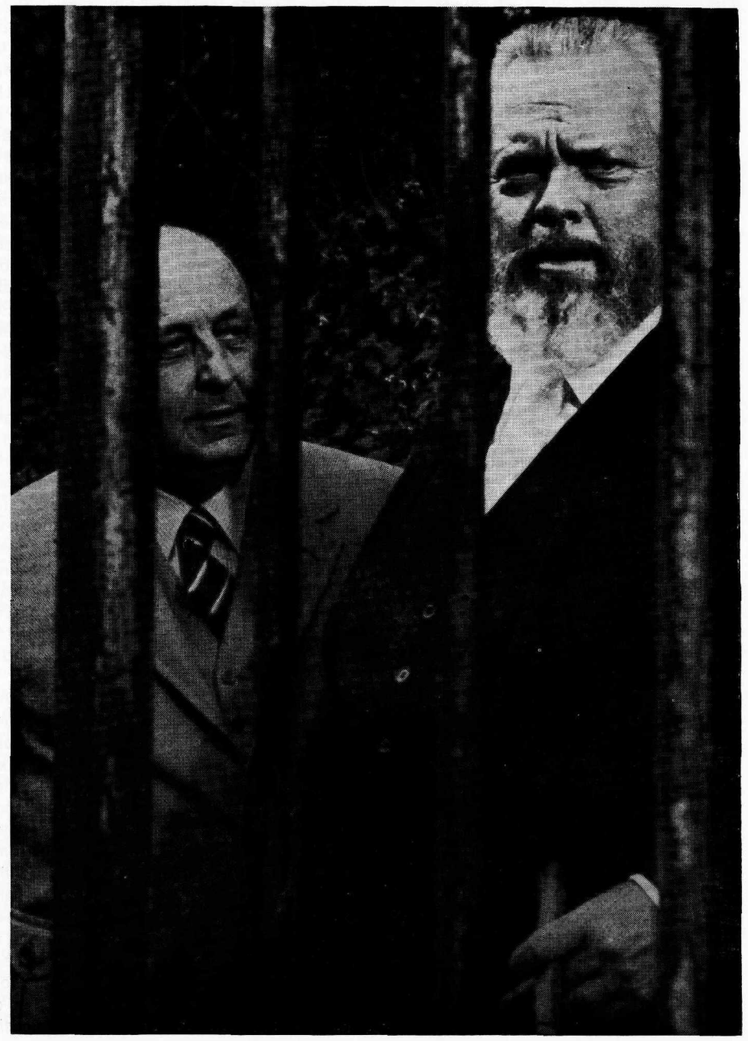
elegant games — to what end?

"I had the feeling that perhaps beneath these signs there lay something of a quite different kind which I must try to discover, some thoughts which they translated after the fashion of those hieroglyphic characters which at first one might suppose to represent only material objects. No doubt the process of decipherment was difficult, but only by accomplishing it could one arrive at whatever truth there was to read . . ."
(Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past,* XII p. 235)

Two full length feature films of Claude Chabrol, *Les Biches* and *La Femme Infidèle* were released in 1968, the first of a whole chain whose success freed Chabrol once and for all from commercial exigencies and enabled him, as far as it was possible in these matters, to function as an independent *auteur* in whose work a certain aesthetic coherence was guaranteed. On the surface these films and the films that followed — *Que La Bête Meure, Le Boucher, Juste Avant La Nuit, La Rupture, La Décade Prodigieuse* — are straightforward enough: characterisation and setting are realised in the traditional *vraisemblable,* producing a scrupulous "naturalism" available for example in the detailed observation of bourgeois family life in *La Femme Infidèle,* as, equally, the scenes of village community — weddings, shopping, funerals — in *Le Boucher.* Coupled with this is found a deference, in terms of plot, to violence, search and revenge — in short: the conventions of the thriller genre defined as the very stuff of narrative cinema, where sexual jealousy leads to murder (*La Femme Infidèle, Les Biches)* or the private citizen deprived of legal justice in a case where his son has been killed in an accident, pursues his own path of revenge *(Que La Bête Meure).*

Beyond a certain point however, the simplicity itself becomes puzzling: it is

Enclosed, exclusive worlds . . . Welles in La Decade Prodigieuse



not merely a question of the year 1968 inaugurating this cycle (to look at these films one might be forgiven for imagining the May events had never taken place). It is within the self-defined aesthetic of the films themselves that we are constantly troubled. How to explain their *immaculacy*? Is not the meticulously "beautiful" photography of Decae and Jean Rabier a trifle bland? What — if anything — lies behind that unruffled surface? These questions are complex because it has become evident that Chabrol himself poses them ironically. As a pupil of Hitchcock he invites critics to fall into the trap of searching for "significance", a too literal interpretation of his symbols (which in any event he rarely bothers to hide; their very obtrusiveness should act as caution). Thus: "of course" his films are about Appearance and Reality; in *Le Boucher*, for instance, the hero's friendly and civilised manner masks the reality of his true nature; that of a savage murderer (the neolithic caves functioning as an explicit metaphor for the "hidden reality"). But it is perfectly characteristic of Chabrol to insist on another level that Appearance and Reality coincide; in the same film what could be more obvious than to have an army butcher who has seen too much blood in his time turn out to be a psychopathic murderer? There is a suspicion — we shall come back to it — of a protracted joke at the expense of "meaning".

Appearance and Reality: the capital letters are there to suggest that the phrase functions and is familiar within a critical discourse defined as "humanist". The opposition appearance and reality is a commonplace in a certain *moral tradition* of literary criticism (familiar enough to students of university English studies) where the narrative trajectory peels away the excrescences of appearance to reveal a more authentic moral reality beneath. Such a reality is habitually absolute and fixed, functioning literally as "the truth" (about man's moral nature or whatever), and the means of presenting this reality — the writing itself or the cinematic image — are traditionally transparent and unproblematic. In literary studies F. R. Leavis has persuasively illustrated this approach and it is no accident that Robin Wood — an acknowledged admirer of Leavis — should in his book on Chabrol (1970)[1] follow this "general line", attempting throughout to recuperate Chabrol from charges of cynicism and to establish him as a moralist who wishes to "seek out new *positive* values by which to live."[2] *Le Boucher* in this light becomes a moral parable whose meaning can be gauged by a simple explication of its Hitchcockian *mise-en-scene.* On this level the film is a traditional murder drama that invites us to view the issue of blame and guilt as *complicated* and *ambivalent,* insisting again and again that "appearances are deceptive". The hero Popaul (Jean Yanne) is portrayed in a sympathetic light and the crimes he commits are for the most part placed outside the context of the film's key investigation: the relationship between Popaul and the village schoolmistress Helène (Stephane Audran). The audience is then encouraged to identify with Helène's admiration for Popaul, until the discovery of a lighter she has given him beside a brutally battered corpse shocks us into reconsidering our moral allegiance. There follows a scene (beautifully done in terms of that disturbing naturalism) in which Popaul later that night comes round to visit Helène with a present of marinated cherries. Popaul, we assume, knows nothing of Helène's suspicions and talks away in his usual charming manner as they eat the cherries, while Helène tries bitterly to hold back her tears. Popaul casually takes a cigarette and proceeds to light it with a lighter *identical to the one Helène had given him* — and the emotional tension is burst with Helène dissolving in a flood of tears. Perhaps he is not responsible for the murder after all . . .

This approach to the film (carried through of course to the point where it is revealed that Popaul *is* beyond doubt the murderer) is seen as self-explanatory, requiring no justification; Chabrol is examined as if he were Hitchcock, ignoring altogether the problem that if this is so then Chabrol's films are curiously old-fashioned: is there not a problem in making films like Hitchcock in 1972? And if the films are not mere imitations, such an approach omits the possibility of a Hitchcockian *mise-en-scene* functioning as a *mode of irony,* an artistic form aware of its own ideology. The trouble with Wood's approach is that it leads to predictable and limited results in terms of the film's 'final meaning', a reality which Wood defines as "the necessity for love", illustrated with disarming literalness: "had Helène been able to give him the love he required one feels sure that the beast in Popaul would have been cured, and the man reborn."[3] Characters are spoken of as if they had an existence outside the film: (Of Popaul) "Although his broken home background and his enforced employment as a butcher certainly laid the foundations for his mental illness, its nature — an obsession with blood — is clearly related to the experience of those years",[4] and the extent to which the medium is itself treated as transparent is suggested by a long list of options: *if* Helène could have committed herself at the cherry scene, *if* only she had done this a few seconds earlier . . .[5]

A fair amount of time has been spent on this example only to illustrate the difficulty of a literal approach to Chabrol. Nowhere do such claims for a moral commitment in Chabrol come near to the sense, in his films, of the strange and the subversive — and at the same time of the farcical. His characters, far from existing in a one to one relationship with the outside world, seem to exist in an increasingly enclosed universe; the closeted bourgeois homes protected by parks and trees of *La Femme Infidèle* and *Les Biches* have been exchanged recently for an even more baroque desolation: Theo's gabled mansion in *La Décade Prodigieuse* or the Victorian boarding-house with its hint of unexplored and mysterious rooms and corridors in *La Rupture.* The action of *Le Boucher* unfolds "loin de la cité" and what city scenes there are in Chabrol's recent films are shot — like Bertolucci's Paris in *The Conformist* or Bunuel's Toledo in *Tristana* — against a background of elegant and oldfashioned buildings, to produce the sense that time has been arrested; in *La Rupture* a journey through a vast deserted park is undertaken by tram-scenes shot in Belgium, authentic home of *"Bruges-la-morte",* the symbolist city; while everywhere the resonant cello of Pierre Jansen's musical score reinforces the insistence on separateness, on the films' discrete hermetic quality.

In *Le Boucher* any emphasis on the "psychology" of the characters is misleading for it encourages us to ignore the aspects of the film most remarkable: namely, its repeated insistence on its own fictions, a series of clues about itself asking to be considered. There is everywhere an overt visual symbolism, puzzling and ironical, as it seems to dare us by its very obviousness to offer an an "interpretation". For example, variations on the play of red and white occur in three of the key moments of the film. In the first instance, the finding of the mutilated corpse is heralded by drops of blood falling in to a child's sandwich on the school outing: while the whole scene is itself held within the larger rhythm of light (the elegance and lightness of the previous outdoor dancing scene), dark (the visit to the caves), light (the bright sun on the hillside). The second and corresponding sequence occurs just before Popaul discovers his lighter in Helène's drawer; in this scene white paint drips on the carpet from the ceiling (the red here provided by the colour of Jean Yanne's painting cap). The third and final sequence occurs at the end of the film when the lift in which the dying Popaul is taken up to the *operating theatre registers "occupé"* on a flashing red button, forcing Helène to see his life literally bleed away (the doctor announcing from the top of the stairs that he is dead).

A short close-up in each case (the bread, the carpet, the lift button) defines the correspondence explicitly. But a moment's reflection is enough to see that the whole film operates on the principle of an interlocking enmeshed clash of opposites whose basic polarity is black/white. It is a film of night and day (the schoolhouse by day filled with children, the schoolhouse by night, empty, surrounded by darkness); individual shots and scenes reproduce the confrontation; on their last evening together Popaul walks down the stairs from bright light into darkness casually registering his lack of surprise that there has been yet another murder; the stairs themselves are punctuated by darkness and light as Helène runs to close the shutters and bolt the door; finally, on the wall of the stairs hangs an abstract design showing a field of red flowing into, interlocking with, a blue design.

To look for a meaning within these symbols — symbols which are neither hidden (on the contrary) nor made to suggest anything profound; to interpret them as direct referents to the outside world, the world, in the Proust quotation, of "material objects", is to miss the point. What we notice about them above all is their extreme formality and symmetry, the wealth of variations on the stock opposition — in short, their *formal* disposition. They are signs which exist in a quasi-autonomous role, forms without meaning in a circular discourse. We are witnessing a movement away from the sign *meaning* something to a situation where the sign refers only to other signs, other fictions. What is the object of this strategy? What Chabrol is doing in effect is to suggest the ambivalence and possible poverty of the sign; he is directing his attack on the tyranny of the "signifié", that fixity of meaning and sense that is traditionally associated with a Christian or catholic discourse. Chabrol's later films offer — in the Joycean phrase — a "hesitation" of meaning, a hovering of sense in the interests of structural concerns, a deliberate separation of the real world from the "reel world". This becomes very clear in, for example, *La Décade Prodigieuse (Ten Days Wonder)* where the signs, in the form of crosses, references to Jehovah, the Garden of Eden etc., multiply to the point of absurdity — an intentional absurdity, as is made clear by the onlooker-sympathiser of Michel Piccoli, the "brilliant legal mind", patiently explaining the references at the end of the film; (a mischievousness one might add that is not wholly absent from a scene in *Le Boucher* I have already mentioned where the party of schoolchildren visit the cro-magnon caves at Tremolat. Here again the correspondence between neolithic man and the "beast beneath the surface" is too obvious to be entirely innocent. In short, the sequence functions as an extended joke, especially as when asked by Helène what cro-magnon man would be like if he were alive today, a child answers that "it would be very nice to meet him"). Examples are available from any of Chabrol's films: the obtrusive lamp illuminating every stage of Charles's (Michel Duchaussoy) quest for his son's killer in *Que La Bête Meure,* delegating him as "chosen one", an obtrusiveness which in the Christian context can only be ironical; another example would be the child's bedtime reading matter ("Les Origines des Dieux") in *La Femme Infidèle* or the Tarot pack of the three cronies or Fates, inmates of the boarding house of *La Rupture.* Here we approach the authentic feel of a Chabrol movie, never far from farce, in that ironical area obtained by playing off a conventional thriller against a deliberately inflated Christian symbolism.

We are now in a position to look again at the moral issue, the hypothesised humanist, religious message at the core of Chabrol's films. Such an interpretation could be more mistaken. Not surprisingly for a film-maker whose concerns are primarily with formal patterns, Chabrol offers as "subject matter" a section of society whose moral conduct is, precisely, *aestheticized;* a segment of society (normally the bourgeoisie) whose personal relationships, in the quest for a "fine pattern" or a "just" (i.e. aesthetically pleasing) solution, are marked solely by *hypocrisy, perversion, manipulation.* In such a society none of the moral consequences — guilt, salvation, atonement or whatever — of a traditional Christian parable can be taken at face value. What his films increasingly portray is a milieu in which crimes are committed in order to experience guilt as a personal gratification: sometimes this satisfaction is erotic, as in the earlier Chabrol movie *Landru,* where the hero is portrayed as possessing a delicate aesthetic sensibility, an appreciation of the "good things" of life whch is not at all (fine irony) contradicted by his activities as murderer of beautiful women. Again, the satisfaction may be an intellectual one, as in *La Décade Prodigieuse* where Théo (Orson Welles) sets up a whole series of crimes in order to experience the satisfaction of being unmasked — the story recalls Borges' "Death and the Compass" — by the world's "finest legal mind" (Michel Piccoli); a plan to which the fitting end can only be his own suicide. Théo's plans in the meantime have involved the destruction of his wife (played by Marlene Jobert) and adopted son (Anthony Perkins), which prompts two reflections. The first is that the *family* as the traditional focus of Christian values is everywhere in Chabrol indicted, shown up as hypocritical. Consider *La Femme Infidèle:* a man murders his wife's lover only to find a surprising complicity from his wife in the face of police investigations. As the police come for the final arrest the husband and wife reaffirm their love for each other. The husband is taken away . . . The irony here is entirely at the expense of the bourgeois family whose marriage has indeed been *consecrated* by murder; guilt is presented as a self-indulgent luxury and, far from showing us "the central importance of the family",[6] the dominating sentiments of the film are hypocrisy and prurience. The second observation is this: in a society where aesthetic considerations are uppermost, human beings will be treated as objects, to be acquired (Frédérique's predatory nature in *Les Biches:* her acquisition, by cash, of the pavement artist Why) — or discarded. Along with a *fetishism of objects,* those "spoils" of bourgeois life — cigarettes, lighters, cars, drinks, television sets — we observe a situation (a parallel here with Henry James) in which people *become* objects of art: Théo in *La Décade* dresses his wife in beautiful clothes and jewels in order that she can take her place among objects of priceless value in his collector's mansion. The sexual behaviour of the inhabitants of this world will be correspondingly perverse. Théo's "acquisition" of his wife involved him "buying" her as a child of ten from one of his tenants and marrying her as a child bride. The link between a fetishism of objects and sado-sexual behaviour is explicitly provided when he murders her by slitting her throat with a razor replacing her "lost" diamond necklace with a necklace of blood . . .

"Overdetermined" violence . . . La Rupture

Not to labour the point, Chabrol's world is one of "decadence". Let us repeat however that Chabrol's primary intention is neither to endorse nor to censure values. This is not a novel enterprise: the world he offers us, a world in which form and content so strangely mirror each other, a world of "play", complicity, games, with its perspective lacking fixity or full final meaning is the product of a certain type of European consciousness. Henry James has been mentioned; but Chabrol's "play of forms" is reminiscent also of a French literary tradition concerning itself with the decadence of ruling institutions and the values they inculcate that can be traced back through Proust and Flaubert to Stendhal and Laclos. This world is also "aesthetic', literary, *romanesque.* The characters — those dandies and ironists who people the pages of Stendhalian and Flaubertian fiction — see the options of their lives in terms of the lives of the heroes of their favourite novels. Flaubert's melancholy account of Frederic's sojourn abroad in *L'Education Sentimentale,* "Il voyagea. . . il revint", with its stress, in the clipped preterite, on a circular futility is translated by Chabrol into the circulating rack of books in the bookseller's window of an earlier film, *Les Cousins,* or the empty revolving turntable with which the film ends. The episodes which punctuate this circular journey are seen as, precisely, tableaux; frozen, stylized, demanding to be labelled: "The Brothel Scene", "The Races", "The June Days" etc. (In *Les Biches* we find the film divided into four formal segments, Prologue, Frédériue, Why, Epilogue). There is a similar insistence on the dictating power of the camera's eye — as in, for example, the pre-credits sequence of *La Femme Infidèle* where the

mother, father, child, mother-in-law self-consciously group themselves into a family pose. The grouping is demanded by dictates of elegance and symmetry while the pose suggests that the Chabrol protagonist *knows* that he is acting, that he is engaged in a game involving formidable and unscrupulous opponents (who, in the case of *Le Boucher* and *Les Biches* are also lovers). Thus we can trace in Chabrol's films a line of actors aware of the roles they are engaged in — from the parts played by Jean-Claude Brialy in *Les Cousins* and *Les Godelureaux* through the antics of *Ophelia* in which André Jocelyn plays out the tragedy of "Hamlet", to the figure of Orson Welles in the 'role' of God in *La Décade* (both *La Décade* and *La Rupture* refusing in this respect the tentative naturalism of *Le Boucher*). This is a Racinian world from which the tragedy has been extracted leaving us only with the actors — like the out-of-work tragedian in the boarding house of *La Rupture* — mouthing their lines in frenzied hyperbole; while the films circle on endlessly in a world of mirrors (from which the Orson Welles of *Lady From Shanghai* is clearly no stranger) — airtight and hermetic, scrupulously excluding the light of the "real" world.

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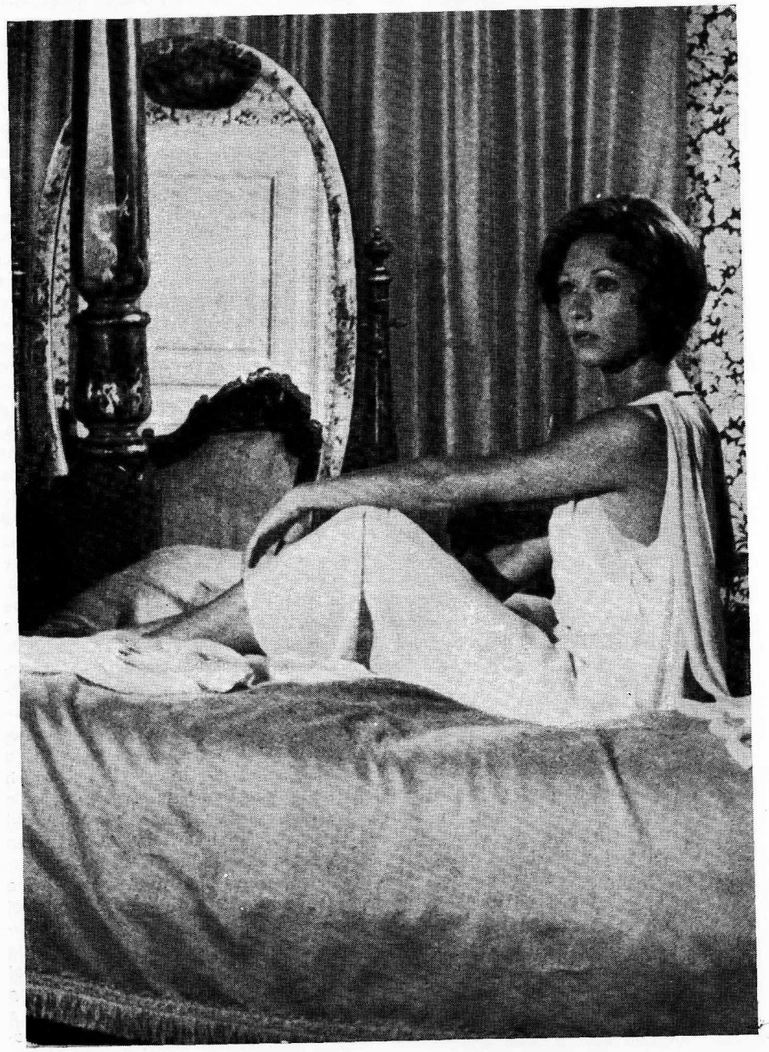
Truffaut's concerns are also for the "romanesque": it is there in the play of circulation and movement, which make his cinema a highly stylised account of journeys to and from a given place, most noticeably in the *La Ronde* circularity of *Jules et Jim* with its travelling crane shots back and forward over the mountain hut, but noticeable also in the various journeys undertaken by car, train and aeroplane in *La Peau Douce, Tirez Sur Le Pianiste* or *La Sirène du Mississippi*. It is there also in the sense in which his characters get *caught up* in incongruous or romanesque roles[7] — the Virgin Bride turned murderess (Jeanne Moreau in *The Bride Wore Black;* Catherine Deneuve in *La Sirène*) or the series of situations verging on the farcical which Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) gets involved in the sentimental education Truffaut traces from *Les 400 Coups* to *Baisers Volés*. But there is a difference between Chabrol and Truffaut: Chabrol's world is self-sufficient and self-enclosing, a world of such stringent irony that the audience is in danger of being excluded altogether. Truffaut on the contrary brings us *into* the romanesque, and makes us see it in the last resort as tragic, as, precisely, a *predicament*. He says: it is the fate of men and women to mistake literature for life; this error has fatal consequences (consequences leading to death, as in the final scene of *Jules and Jim*, where the circle of fictions is dramatised in the latter stages of the film by Jeanne Moreau in the car weaving in and out of the trees — before finally breaking out at a tangent which has her drive the car straight off the end of the bridge where she plunges to her death in the river...) *Anne and Muriel (Deux Anglaises et le Continent)* is exemplary in this aspect. Here as in Chabrol the romanesque sensibility is explicitly linked to the bourgeois world of which the film is ostensibly a portrait, but unlike Chabrol, the tone of the film, puzzling as it is, is not ironical.

The insistence on the literary origins of *Anne and Muriel* is apparent from the outset where the credit sequence shows us the text of Roché's novel amended by Truffaut's observations. The film is furthermore the mirror image of a previous film, *Jules et Jim* (also from a novel by Roché) explicit references to which are made in the dialogue. The affinity of both films to the novel form is apparent once more in their attempt to trace a whole affair stretching — like the love affairs in the novels of Henry James or the Bronte sisters — over many years and linked by a distinctively literary voice-over narration. Thus the scene is set for *Anne and Muriel* with its sepia browns and explicit fade outs, to unfold like an old photograph album its story — romanesque to the last degree — of fatal attraction, doomed love and final retribution. It is a film in which sooner or later everyone is aware of a *role* that circumstance has forced on them and which they are "condemned" to play out. Initially, a rich young man Claude (Jean-Pierre Léaud) after an accident on a swing, comes to stay in Wales with the two sisters Anne (Kika Markham) and Muriel (Stacey Tendeter). Claude is content at first to fall for the more engaging Anne, who, however, tries to transfer Claude's interest on to her sister Muriel, painting an idealised figure with whom the romantic Claude must fall in love This happens in due course — with the expected unhappy consequences, for Muriel will have nothing of him. They separate for a trial period, Claude returning to Paris to become an art dealer and critic; Muriel in turn becomes a teacher of small children (the governess or village schoolmistress of innumerable Victorian novels). Anne's career turns out to be no less romanesque. Her admiration for Rodin and her Parisian *atelier* suggests that Truffaut insists that

Women as luxury furniture... Marlene Jobert in La Decade Prodigieuse



behind her sexual freedom lies a consciously assumed role, that of a representative early advocate of free love, the celebrated "emancipated Englishwoman".

Claude's love for Muriel persists (while Anne remains for a time his mistress) demanding eventually that he write a book about the whole affair, which, completed, is printed privately and entitled, an obvious cross-reference — "Jerôme et Julien". The voice over of the narrator at this point is perfectly revealing of the film's literary idiom, and requires to be kept in the original French: "Pour la première fois, Claude fut atteint profondément Lui, qui avait tant fait suffrir, découvrit la souffrance à son tour. Il sombra des jours enfermé dans l'obscurité, doutant de tout et même sa propre identité: il attendait le sommeil en répétant à voix basse; 'Je ne suis personne, je n'existe pas, je ne comprends plus rien à la vie.' Puis il trouva progressivement la guérisson par les moyens qui étaient les siens; il écrivit son premier roman, 'Jerôme et Julien'. A travers des émotions d'une femme qui aima toute sa vie deux hommes en même temps, il était aisé de reconnaitre à peine transposée l'histoire de son amour pour les deux soeurs."

But the writing of a novel is no permanent cure for characters stricken with a fatal *mal du siècle*. Anne dies of consumption, the last words on her lips echoing those of her heroine Charlotte Bronte. Claude is by now played out, betrayed as he has been all along in mistaking literature for life. In the final scenes Muriel arrives in France where they make love for the first time in a hotel bedroom. As the camera pans slowly up the bed eventually filling the screen with the scarlet bloodstained sheet, the voice over records ("c'était fait... il y avait du rouge sur son or") the symbolic difference between red and gold, the one genuine, life giving, to be grasped, the other literary, false and inauthentic. They part next day, never to meet again. "Years later" as the novels say, warned by a letter that Muriel is married and has children, Claude is walking in the gardens of the Musée Rodin and hears the voices of a party of English children; he turns, hoping perhaps to catch a glimpse of Muriel's child — and the film closes on a contrast between the haggard, grey and ageing Claude and the carefree indifference of the children.

Truffaut means us to accept the film as tragic in that it speaks of the mystification which ensues when fiction and reality are confused. Claude's history has an exemplary moral: fiction and life have no one to one correspondence. Anyone who thinks they do is condemned to live his life in a dream, mistaking the imaginary for the real at every point along the line: the moment of awaking will be traumatic, like Leo's initiation in Losey's *The Go-Between* — a film in many ways so similar to *Anne and Muriel* — and likely to mark one for life. Like Losey, too, Truffaut shares a residual fascination for that world of false forms, the *haute bourgeosie* whose Edwardian apotheosis and its subsequent shattering in the first world war Truffaut portrayed so economically in *Jules et Jim*.

The "immaculacy" of recent Truffaut, his seeming refuge in the past or the exotic (what amounts to the same) is at first glance as puzzling as the surface blandness of Chabrol. The *tone* of Truffaut — that strange mixture of lightheartedness — is difficult to pin down; difficult because the earnestness seems to lie just this side of parody, in his insistence on taking seriously, while being aware of its "ideology", the pathos or *plight* of, for example, the Victorian heroine. This becomes clear in his full-blooded treatment of the stock situation or literary cliché, his refusal to signal it out and differentiate it from other areas of the film. In *Anne and Muriel* for instance we find that Muriel's somewhat mysterious blindness is explained — in detail, she sends a letter to Claude — by the fact that since childhood she has been a *compulsive masturbator!* Likewise the very situation of Claude is a witty paradigm — as the opening shot of his falling from a swing and breaking his leg makes clear — of the fate of a young man surrounded from childhood by domineering and overprotective women (the careful emphasis placed on Claude's mother and the benignly forceful Mrs. Brown); everywhere we look in Truffaut we find a tragic situation undercut by elements of farce. (*Tirez sur le Pianiste* and *La Sirène du Mississippi* are in this respect particularly difficult to pin down, defying any genre in their unpredictable changes from light comedy to something altogether more serious.) But it would be a mistake to think that Truffaut's 'intensity' — when there — is in any sense ironic. Let me conclude by looking at two different instances of Chabrol and Truffaut's use of colour which may perhaps stand as metaphors for their respective preoccupations. *Le Boucher* makes clear that part of Chabrol's intention is to attack a fixed symbolism of colour: both *La Rupture* and *La Décade Prodigieuse* provide notable examples of primary colours heightened or alternatively drained — purples, mauves, pale greens. In *La Décade* Michel Piccoli arrives at a small country railway station to stay with Orson Welles. As he gets off the train the camera pans round almost a full circle to reveal Marlene Jobèrt alone in a bright pink dress waiting to collect him. The intensity of the dress's colour suggests immediately a rupture between the outside world, the world of Paris, Citroens, trains, and the very different world — suspended permanently in that "marvellous autumn" of 1925 — of Orson Welles. The colour signals an aspect of a world that is at once icy, bizarre and decadent, a separate world that cautions the spectator to keep his distance. Very different is the use of bright red in *Anne and Muriel;* I have already mentioned the magnificent scarlet of Muriel's blood which fills the screen; but this is a scarlet which has been picked from a previous scene in which Muriel arrives in Calais. Here, as she descends the gangway, the red bows of the boat shimmer with the light reflected from the water. The image on the screen is not merely a metaphor of reflection, one of Chabrol's multiple mirrors, but stands in its own right, suggesting by its power and warmth a reiterated emotional resonance that defines in Truffaut a certain "humanism"; it is a red that invites from the audience an "unintellectual" acceptance and complicity.

Mark Le Fanu

NOTES

1 *Claude Chabrol* by Robin Wood and Michael Walker: Studio Vista
2 ibid. p. 6
3 ibid. p. 134
4 ibid. p. 132
5 ibid. p. 138
6 ibid. p. 126
7 cf 'Truffaut' in *Brighton Film Review* no. 21

A "literary" self-consciousness... Kika Markham and J-P Léaud in Anne and Muriel.

'Objectivity' as irony: Werner Herzog's *Fata Morgana*

To confront documentary is to confront the spirit of 'objectivity' in the cinema, a spirit many thought prematurely laid by the priests of cinema-verité, the tool of exorcism being the portable cine-camera, its dogma that of spontaneity and the bland worship of the moment. As elusive as ever, the spectre continues to walk abroad. Cinema deludes precisely because of the technical precision of its representational property. Beyond this miasma of facility lies the problem of capturing the essence of those surfaces, real or artificial, that life flaunts negligently before the lens. The problem remains fundamentally identical whether the camera is focussed on a street or its sound-stage replica, thereby dismissing the fallacy that the value of documentary is merely 'objective' concentration, photographed reality. When Marker and Resnais exploded the dead monolith of Western museum culture in *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953), they also re-opened the documentry debate by rejecting the enbalming function that apparently self-justifying reportage exercised on its subject, and endorsing a vital link between material and perception. The principle of that film was that, in the same way that the meaning (i.e. the resonance) of primitive African art disappeared with the rupturing of the indigenous context, so documentary divorced itself from reality through the simplistic mock-humility of this 'objective' approach. In the films and the theoretical asides of Marker, the unsung champion of the 'radical' documentary, we find the problems of cinematic objectivity posed afresh; and at the base of the discussion may be discovered the documentary's potential powers of synthesis between man and his environment. It is this synthesis that Marker constantly seeks, but not through the soft option of apparently impartial recording. In *Lettre de Siberie* (1957), he tells us: "Mais l'objectivité non plus n'est pas juste. Elle ne deforme pas la réalité ... mais elle l'arrête le temps d'un jugement, et par là la deforme quand même. Ce qui compte, c'est l'elan et la diversité." Thus Marker constructs his films through "l'association d'idées, l'allusion, le calembour optique"; statistics have their uses but only in the capacity subservient to a poetic irony as in *Description d'un Combat* (1960) when a pregnant woman is the image accompanying the commentary that Israel counts "two million inhabitants, soon three million". Of Israel, Marker says that "ce pays vous adresse d'abord des signes"; these signs become ideas via the catalyst of a meditative imagination. Marker is one of the few documentary film-makers to have realised that the camera is less the instrument of discovery than a tool imposing a fresh viewpoint; his genre of the "ciné-essai" discovers the synthesis of past and future in the present by noting the materialisation of myth and fairy-tale in the modern world (c.f. his book *Coréennes* for the finest example of this), and demonstrating continuity via the small detail, the punning image, the contrapuntal nature of the audio-visual continuum. His subjects are Peking 1955 or Cuba 1961 but they reflect eternal preoccupations in an art of the infinite. Klee makes this oblique, 'depouillé' method central to the artistic vision; "Thus the artist surveys with penetration the finished forms which nature places before him. The deeper he looks, the more readily he can extend his view from the present to the past, the more deeply he is impressed by the one essential image of Creation itself, as Genesis, rather than by the image of nature, the finished product". Talk of Creation brings me to Werner Herzog and *Fata Morgana*.

Like Marker, Herzog has rejected fact in favour of imagery, which can express universality with so much more force than the statistic. He realises that only allusion may properly express depth, that only subjectivity will intimate objective mass. And his opening image prefigures his method; the pre-credit sequence is of huge jets that land seven times in slow succession through the glittering distortion of a heat-haze. With an almost immobile camera and naked cutting, Herzog allows us to re-examine the appearance and the motion of the planes; through a 'natural' perversion of the image, and a ritualistic repetition, they become ethereal and abstract. This is precisely his idea — the re-investigation of phenomena through the media of differing contexts, the 'poetic' transposition of objects that are given a new perspective less through the investiture of meaning than the revelation of cosmic, extra-contemporary resonance. Herzog's film undoubtedly qualifies as spectacle, but its staging is not facile; its artifice is that of subtle mutation and oblique allusion. The presence of the jets at the beginning of the film is therefore redolent of a poetic structure insofar as it designates the trajectory of *Fata Morgana*; the planes are evidence of one world, but perhaps more importantly avatars of another, deriving an alternative value from precisely 'real' appearance and manifestations.

The film is divided into three parts; "Creation", over which the ghostly voice of Lotte Eisner reads from the text of an account of Genesis by the Quiche Indians of the sixteenth century, "Paradise", and the "Golden Age", both of which are accompanied by Herzog's own text, humorous in a surreal manner. "Creation" supplies in its essence the conceptual core of the film, designating, after the jets, the reasoning behind the sustained reverie of *Fata Morgana*. It opens with views of the landscapes of the Southern Sahara, which are beautiful by a kind of awe-inspiring default, reminiscent of the fluid 'time-hallucinations' round the Magnetic City in Wyndham Lewis' *The Childermass*. At first, these landscapes presented in static shots or slow pans; when this method is replaced by tracking shots, Herzog moves from the passive-descriptive to the active-perceptive. An example of what I mean is one long travelling shot, right to left, depicting the striations of the wind in huge sand-dunes left to right; the result is that the actual camera movement becomes the catalyst for an expression of abstract motion, in which it performs the functions of arbiter and participant, accompanied alternatively by choral music and a percussion-based jazz on the sound-track. Thus what Herzog has done is to replace the customary static 'objectivity' of the documentary shot, not, as Marker might have done, with an obliquely humorous visual pun, but by employing the physical movement of the camera to elicit an abstract perception. It remains abstract at this stage because the landscapes are themselves inhuman; but gradually the rhythm of the film is accelerated as the commentary announces the birth of Man. This is effected by another long travelling shot, during which the camera focusses on water in which the sky is reflected, then tilts up to the sky, then down again to the water, a simple movement that counterbalances the monolithic landscapes by expressing the dialectical interplay of elements in Creation. This is followed in immense long-shot, by the tiny figure of a man shown walking in the desert; Herzog's panning camera gradually outstrips the figure in a movement to the right that shows us the implacable monotony of the desert stretching into infinity. Perhaps this shot may be construed as a symbolic indication of Man's trajectory in the world, but it would seem to remain ambivalent in the context of the film's overall tone. A consequence of Herzog's method is that the quality of the images remains evocative rather than concrete; as with the travelling shots, the basis of that method is reverie on landscape transformed by the subtle pyrotechnic of the cinema into perception, allusion. The camera here performs the Godlike creative function, hovering over its material while the images record their own accumulation and dissipation of meaning; such ambivalence, rather than representing a refuge for the undecided director, is at the heart of the method of *Fata Morgana*. Another example; we see an Arab boy displaying his cat to the camera, with the indigence of his environment visible behind him, and in the far distance the blaze of oil-refinery wastage — what might here be suggested is a sociological bias eclipsing the universality for which I have been arguing. But Herzog has previously shown us the refinery blaze in the context of a mythological creation of Fire — are we not therefore watching the terrible exigencies of the proper Creation? A sociological point is thus made and yet also dissolved into its obverse — that sense of infinity which is the reward of Herzog's documentary faithfulness and the rigour of his framing; doctrinaire naturalism transforms itself into a vision of the world.

This rhythm of Creation, this accumulation and dissipation of the harmony of meaning, is emphasised by the events of the commentary. Things have gone wrong; the Creator must revoke his creations, who have not adapted sufficiently to their environment. Herzog tracks past the debri of survival — houses constructed from automobile hulks and jet-wreckage; his hand-held camera stalks through the rotted carcases of animals. "Creation" ends with the first appearance of a 'sign' (in the sense of Marker) which will be transformed by Herzog's editing into the abstract expression of the ambivalence he finds; a mysterious object moving through an intense heat-haze (perhaps the crew's VW bus gadding about under orders). But a primary affirmation of movement? Or even Lewis' 'nodal obscenity'?

An old blind man, his chest pinned with medals, is led out from the shadow of a cave by a young girl with a transistor slung around her neck; the old man speaks harshly, the girl seems bored — Herzog gives us a close-up of the medals, as if in mock reverence. Thus "Paradise" begins, and with it the resumption of vivid imagery whose import is decidedly unclear. Nevertheless, Herzog is clearly interested in a more exclusively human sphere, after the tentative existence of "Creation", given that the period behind "Creation" (the deliberately distanced abstract tone exemplified by the commentary and the landscapes, and the consequently necessary ambivalence and relative sense of meaning engendered) dominates the remaining sections of the film. "In Paradise, the plane wrecks are distributed beforehand"; once again, adaptation entails the presence of dereliction, and to a long tracking shot of a native settlement, Herzog adds the oblique punctuation of more animal carcases. Another long tracking-shot, of what appears to be a military storage depot, is accompanied by the sinister drone of Leonard Cohen on the sound-track. The dubious appearances of this depressing environment are carried over into "Paradise"; in place of the jets, a silver bus moves through the heat-haze liken an insect. But Herzog seems most interested in the strange humanity that he encounters. Old men wearing huge protuberant goggles squat in the sand slaking lime and chipping stone; these goggles (which are also worn by the dwarfs in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*) became the vehicle of Herzog's ironic 'interference' with reality — even though they are conceivably necessary to combat the glare of the sun. Functioning within the context of the images, the goggles seem to create related resonance. They give the men an extra-terrestrial sense, taking them out of their immediate context. But they also seem to be expressive of a certain Stoic condition in the humanity encountered, as the art of survival is slowly acquired. Thus a large bearded man wearing goggles holds a lizard up to the camera and describes in detail those natural resources that have facilitated the reptiles' adaptation to the harsh environment. The theme is further reinforced by the mysterious image of another goggled man with his head thrown back balancing a little ball on a thin cushion if air blown from his mouth; Herzog pans away from him to more carcasses. One may care to remember here that the central image of a film (*The Leopard Man*) by Jacques Tourneur, that classical advocate of a cautionary morality, was a little ball balanced on the fountain in the village square, the point of equilibrium in an environment rampant with terror and superstition in the face of the unknown; often during *Fata Morgana*, one senses that Herzog is the spiritual heir of those directors (Lang, Tourneur) whose films postulate a fundamental disparity between man and his environment — this, too, goes back to Marker and his idea of the documentary-synthesis, his search for "un art qui est le garant d'un accord entre l'homme et le monde". Yet, to gauge the mood of "Paradise", one must also take into account a sudden shot, seeming to rejoice in the spirit of Creation, in which Herzog pans down the vertical plane of a waterfall and up to the cliffs above, accompanied on the soundtrack by Blind Faith's "Sea of Joy". In ambiguous resolution, "Paradise" ends with the return of the strange mirage-like motion in the heat-haze.

The third section, the "Golden Age" extrapolates Herzog's concern with human factors that we have seen in "Paradise" to what might cursorily pass as the instigation of partnerships and communities in the process of Man's entrenchment. For the first time groups are shown; for example, a longshot of a congregation descending from a bus to go to church, as well as a strange shot during which men, women and children wallow in huge holes, laughing and gibbering. There seems to be an oblique comparison in Herzog's mind at this point between the native population, personified by their goggles in ambivalent stoicism, and the tourists, presented in rather more openly satirical vein. In one shot three tourists of varying sizes perch on rocks, one holding a flowerpot, another a twin-lens reflex camera, and the third, who laughs fatuously, a ukelele; behind them waits an Arab boy holding a camel. In another, explicitly evocative of the man with the lizard, a ridiculous frogman follows around a giant turtle in a pond in the hope that he will learn some of its natural secrets. But the most forceful sequences of the 'Golden Age" are those devoted to the man-and-wife musical night-club act from Teneriffe, Herzog's harsh view of the couple; while the woman plays expressionless accompaniment on the piano, the man, in goggles, performs an elementary percussion and imitates the sound of a trumpet with his voice. This shrill grating music punctuates the "Golden Age"; it is both hymn and dirge, as the couple endlessly repeat it, "death in their eyes, a smile in their faces, a finger in the pie". With its accompaniment, Herzog tilts up from stray bleached bones and pieces of card to the implacable horizon, as if to indicate the constant ambiguity of the environment. The film ends with the final repetition of the movement in the heat-haze, held slightly longer than previously, which retains in its necessary equivocation the spiritual essence of Herzog's documentary-farce. If in *Fata Morgana*, Herzog seems initially to follow Marker's interrogation of the subjective-objective distinction implicit in the consideration of the documentary form, his ascetism sets him apart. If Marker's starting point is the subjectivity of the dream ("...on entrevoit plus qu'on ne voit"), Herzog's is that of the nightmare, whose context is an implacable landscape and whose iconography is debris. Yet what he does share with the radical documentary is a belief in the goal of subjective perception — the belief that in the surface and objects and rituals of contemporary life there is continuity, even though stoically sought for, continuity with the past and the future. Herzog teaches us that the art of the documentary is not the recording of an existing world, but the revelation, within that existing framework, of other worlds.

Peter Lloyd

Bergman: the politics of melodrama

How bourgeois is bourgeois cinema?

Composition by sunlight. Clarity as "ideology" in Straub's Anna Magdalena Bach.

The history of conventional 'bourgeois' cinema over the last two or three years increasingly poses the question, in what sense are the 'marxist' claims of certain film-makers within the conventional system to be met? Clearly there is a case for attacking outright the complacency (of the media, of the press, of educated opinion) which puts that adjectival 'marxist' into operation as an element of *fashion*: (nothing the film public likes more than to be entertained by the ambiguous class modulations of the 'latest' film from Bunuel or Losey). The fact however that the political seriousness of either of these artists is unimpugned by the silliness of automatic labelling — that they are, after all that, in some sense *still* 'marxist' artists — suggests something of the nature of the difficulty. 'Marxist' evidently can't be equated with a necessarily overt polemical stance: for one thing, the films we are thinking of (*The Assassination of Trotsky, The Go-Between, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* to take two or three at random) have on the surface only the most tenuous connection with modern industrial society. Nothing is clearer from thinking about these films than that their 'marxism' accommodates a sometimes intransigent *obliqueness*. Between the film-makers themselves, intelligent discrimination is more necessary than ever.

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Straub remarks somewhere that his film *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* is marxist "in so far as I have respected the mentality of my characters, the mentality of the period in which they lived." The implication here is that the film will be political not in the propagandist sense of "taking a line" — polemical or otherwise — but rather by constructing with precision and delicacy the feeling of a period so that, as it were, one arrives at it for the first time. The *historical* nature of the project will ratify its political relevance and enable us to see by contrast our own situation in a clearer light. Evidntly there is a certain difficulty in equating the 'marxist' element of Straub's project with an historical investigation, since 'historical' cinema (classically in Hollywood) provides precisely the most conventional opportunities for the distortion of 'history': to suggest that Straub's purpose is that of rectifying these distortions is to introduce notions of *accuracy* that are not really central (though they exist) to Straub's purpose. There is however a very simple sense (the only one I want to insist on immediately) in which an historical perspective means a grasp of the unfolding of successive revolutions, a comprehension of the birth and development of modern Europe and America in class terms.

A secondary, stronger, meaning, unstated explicitly by Straub in this particular interview, but there in his whole work, is the suggestion that the 'marxism' of a contemporary artist is guaranteed by a *theoretical* rigour, by a consistent interrogation of the signifying conventions of cinema in the interests of ideological precision. Straub employed in the construction of *Anna Magdalena Bach* a deliberate distantiation which comes out as is well known in a studied avoidance of the expressive: the characters speak in a neutral monotone, the narrative is fragmentary, whole sections of the film are given over to concentrating entirely on the music; the contents of the chronicle are conventionally banal (daily affairs, household accounts, financial worries) — there is everywhere a coolness and a distance which finds its visual metaphor in Straub's stone flagged interiors and the reticence of his plain German churches.

Now the strange thing is that these efforts towards distanciation served only to heighten the emotional resonance of the finished movie. A clue to this can be found in the same interview: here he quoted Griffith when he said "what the modern movie lacks is beauty, the beauty of the wind among the trees". The reference is to the "domestic" Griffith of *Broken Blossoms* and *True Heart Susie* and Straub duly punctuated *Anna Magdalena Bach* with marvellous shots of trees and sky. In the finished film the "poetry" of these scenes overflows their local context and permeates the whole social fabric as Straub portrays it, so that the "documentary" shots of actors engaged in the most mundane tasks, of writing, sewing, playing music or eating becomes filled with a poetic grace and acquires a kind of privileged intensity. Not only is the music exalting (it could scarcely fail to be) but every moment is directed towards this vision of chaste elegance, this ideal of the spacious and the commodious which lies at the heart of the film, suffusing it with light (which pours in through the tall astragalled windows and both literally and metaphorically illuminates the grave bare objects which furnish Straub's interiors). In a word, if anything is strange it is that this 'marxist' film should turn out to be a hymn of praise to a certain way of living which at its inception was classically *bourgeois*. In refinding an original and ideologically untainted cinema, one that recaptured the pristineness of the great silent masterpieces, Straub had chosen as subject matter the bourgeois class as it existed historically, at a certain early date when, as Lukacs would have it, it was still possible to see it as the repository of "enlightened" values.

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It might be profitable to consider the films of as seemingly private and obsessed an individual nature as Ingmar Bergman in this wider context. But before, and by way of a link, we might glance at another strange film which seems to be committed to an ideal vision of bourgeois society: Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*. What is most striking about this film is Truffaut's refusal to be ironical about the society which the boy Victor proved so resistant to. As in Straub, the black and white photography and the lowkeyed coolness of the leading parts — notably Truffaut himself as the boy's guardian Dr Itard — serves only to emphasise a sense of harmony and grace in the social rapports, characterised for instance in the austere decorum between the doctor and his servant Madame Guerin. And once more this harmony is established by a visual elegance and plainless observable in the tall panelled rooms with their large windows letting in an abundance of sunlight, or in the fittingness of the domestic trappings: carved wooden cupboards, sturdy domestic utensils and so on. The "education" of the boy which the film unfolds becomes a paradigm for the proprieties of social existence ,so that the scenes in which the boy is taught to eat a plate of soup or put on a pair of shoes acquires an intensity similar to Straub's: it is as if we were shown these elements of domestic life for the very first time in all their freshness and integrity. The possibilities of bourgeois life become the possibilities of a miraculous poetry.

By the end of the film, of course, the boy can only pronounce the word "lait" and even then in such a way as to make clear he has no conception of language. But there is, to repeat, no irony intended in this ,no polemic against the society which produced so signal a failure. It is no accident that Truffaut's portrayal of Itard emphasises his friendship with the enlightened professional classes who welcomed the French Revolution. In the dawn of this revolution in which the film is set there is a vital expectancy in the air. Reason — hence the emphasis on education — will triumph in the ordering of society. All the poignancy of these naive hopes was held in the scene in which Itard and his doctor colleague (whom he addresses as comrade) stand at the window of the Dead and Dumb Institute looking down through the rain at the huddled figure of the boy in the courtyard. Itard says he will take the boy into his own home and educate him himself; his friend, the director of the institute, is sceptical about his chances of success. The wistfulness of the scene resides in its being shot from the outside through the rain-splashed windows whose panes of glass act as a desolate and impassable barrier, an implicit comment on the doctor's hope and the utopian hopes of the whole revolutionary movement of 1789. *L'Enfant Sauvage* in short was a film whose "marxist" perspectives didn't prevent a certain ambiguous and unpolemical stance on the bourgeoisie, that class, in other words, which 1789 precisely threw into prominence.

It's perhaps worth adding at this point that part of the film's obliqueness lay in its modulation between distance (theoretical rigour, coolness) and its opposite: involvement (the film's evident warmth and emotional resonance), which may in turn have something to do with the biographical facts of Truffaut's own life. Here perhaps we can suggest that the ambiguity of Truffaut's portrayal of institutes and institutions is generated by a *personal* history or obsession. At any rate whatever the reason, the point established is that a "theoretical", distanced mise-en-scene does not preclude a strong emotional commitment to the audience on another level. Indeed ,such is the nature of the psychology and aesthetics of the viewing situation in any film, that it may even be argued that no film is theoretical which *doesn't* generate such an emotional bond between audience and screen.

A final word on Truffaut: I have argued elsewhere, that *Anne and Muriel* presented a section of the same bourgeoisie class a hundred years later, by which time it had become hopelessly reified in a world of false forms: Claude and Muriel live out their lives as a form of the *romanesque* (i.e. as the hero and heroines of their favourite novels) totally bewildered by the diversity of the roles that are offered them. It is as if the grand opportunities for socialization offered the boy in *L'Enfant Sauvage* (offered with all the optimism of an expanding bourgeois world) have exploded into a plethora of roles, each (because of the "unreality" of the basis of bourgeois life by this time) more 'inauthentic' than the last; as if, finally, economic independence as a groundwork for individual aspiration is now seen as anachronistic, delibitating (the parallel with Chechov is very clear). Once more this failure to find authentic 'being' was presented by Truffaut as having its own poignancy — his fascination for the forms in which this alienation works itself out remaining as strong as ever. The point to make clear however is that the film for all its 'remoteness', for all its apparent complicity in *chic* period nostalgia presented those with eyes to see with a message in the last resort *political and social:* this would be precisely my opening contention about Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* and the following notes will take up this perspective and suggest some qualifications.

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Cries and Whispers, a portrait of an enclosed bourgeois household, is set in a remote Swedish mansion at some unspecified time in the nineteenth century. As in *Anne and Muriel* and *Anna Magdalena Bach* (or in Losey's *The Go-Between* to take an English example) the remoteness of the period provides on one level an important critical distanciation: the reticence about dates, times and places is matched by another kind of precision in the forms of address, the clothes and the decor (presented with a scrupulous naturalism instantly recognizable for reasons we'll come to shortly) which enables us to grasp the context of the film, so to speak, *metaphorically*: it stands in its abstractness as a paradigm of *all* enclosed bourgeois environments. Besides this, the conventions and decorum of such a household in the nineteenth century — the relationship, for instance, between mistress and servants — establishes at once a more clear-cut and polarised class structure than would be possible with a contemporary subject matter. In fact, however, this polarity in *Cries and Whispers* allows room for considerable ambiguity/complexity focussed in the presentation of the servant woman Anna (Kari Sylwan) who looks after the household at the disposal of three sisters: Agnes (Harriet Andersson) Anna's mistress, dying of an unspecified disease, Karin (Ingrid Thulin) frigid and austere, and finally Maria (Liv Ullmann) presented as indolent, promiscuous and unable to cope with life. In spite of the evident demandingness of the sisters, there is a feeling which *Cries and Whispers* shares with *Anna Magdalena Bach* and *L'Enfant Sauvage* that the formal politeness and decorum engaged in in class relationships — one which obtains not only between mistress and servant, but also in one's professional relationship with doctors, pastors, mourning women etc. — not only doesn't prevent but positively encourages a certain moral probity and integrity. Like Straub again, Bergman conveys this by a visual pristineness; there is a scene early on in the movie in which we see Anna alone in her small room; the sun pours through the window on the narrow bare bed with its immaculate sheets and blankets. In front of her chest of drawers she repeats a short prayer for her dead child before biting into a large crisp apple. Like the portrait of the servant Madame Guerin in *L'Enfant Sauvage*, what we are presented with is a certain stoicism which is the outcome of the necessity of preserving an intuitive integrity in the face of being hourly at someone else's disposal. This comes out as an austere vision of duty as self respect: of "keeping things going", polishing silver, starching aprons, cooking fine dishes which may nevertheless get sent back after first mouthful, in short, of keeping the house in order. (There is an unfashionable exigence in Bergman's insistence on the validity of all this which I'll come back to: a left-wing feminist critique for instance might be troubled by Anna's "docility".) Furthermore, the "distance" set up by the clear demarcation of roles, mistress and servant, is undercut by a much more complex relationship which exists unarticulated between the four women; Agnes and Maria for instance find/demand in Anna not only the help which her duties as servant dictate but an emotional sustenance which goes far beyond them. As in Straub and Truffaut there are moments in the film when the relationship between the women, despite these outward constraints, seems to offer the possibility of an astonishing harmony: there is, for example, that important flashback from Agnes' diary of the three sisters dressed in white taking a walk in the park: Anna 'attends' them from a respectable distance and when they come to an old swing it is Anna who arranges the platform and pushes the swing backword and forward. What comes out in this scene in terms of a Straubian aesthetic is a "radiance", a sense of a self-sustaining and privileged

moment of being which all four of them share, while Agnes records in a voice over that this is her happiest memory.

Significantly enough this moment, in terms of the film's chronology, is from a previous autumn. The present tense of the film in contrast to Straub admits no such harmony; Agnes lies in bed wracked with pain and dies halfway through the film. The obsequies done, Karin and Maria split up the estate with the ghost of Agnes haunting them. Anna is dismissed from service with a trivial present and an uneasy smile: there is no ambiguity in Bergman's treatment of Karin's diplomat husband who pays Anna off, dry, arrogant, thoughtless, nor in the characterization of Maria at this point, weakly aware that this is not as things should be. One can speak here of a certain kind of class selfishness which on this level is rendered with a perfect psychological justness.

But I think we can go further: Straub's and Truffaut's films (or Godard's for that matter) are not 'marxist' by virtue of either just psychological representation or historical accuracy on the level of plot (although, as I have indicated, neither are as irrelevant as is sometimes argued). It's also a question — to get back to Straub's necessary obliqueness — of their formal preoccupations, the legitimate aesthetic concern about how the construction of the film mediates 'reality'. In Bergman's case the clue lies precisely in that scene on the swing already mentioned: it is the only outdoor scene in the entire film. Elsewhere we are struck by the predominance of an enclosed, hermetic and claustrophobic atmosphere: in place of Straub's windows covered with their clean carved shutters Bergman introduces heavy curtains and a stifling decor of red which seems to cover the entire wall and floor surface of the mansion in a decadent plush. Where have we seen all this before? Where have we suffered this theatrical oppressiveness? Precisely in those nineteenth century melodramas of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg in which the alienation engendered by bourgeois society — the lies, the sexual hypocrisy, the corruscating snobbery — were first and classically articulated. Bergman's film seems to use this convention in a quite deliberate way: the opening shots in measured medium distance establish the country house as private, distanced, hermetic, separated from the outside world by its spacious park — as, precisely, a *dolls house* in whose 'artificial' atmosphere the ensuing drama will work itself out. From this point on the action of the film all takes place as it were *on stage*, and Bergman is rigorous in not taking advantage, except for that one occasion, of the opportunities the cinema classically provides for realism in location: (contrast here Losey's cinematic use of the Norfolk mansion in *The Go-Between*). This "use", if one can call it that, of the Chekhovian convention, provides ideally a further historical perspective, a reflection — ultimately a distancing device which ensures a theoretical dimension precisely because in imitating that stage convention so carefully, Bergman simultaneously challenges the ideology of realism the nineteenth century theatre was at such pains to uphold. (The prismatic 'irony' which results from juxtaposing one medium on another can also be seen — in a more schematic, "distanced" way — in the inter-war melodrama *Krankheit der Jugend* which takes up the first half of Straub's *The Bridegroom, the Actress and the Pimp* or, more recently, the performance of Corneille's *Othon* in Straub's film of that name).

Searching out the truth ... the relentless closeups of Cries and Whispers.

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The bourgeois melodrama as exemplified by Ibsen or Chechov has the advantage of providing Bergman with an immediate aesthetic vocabulary: the single set of the three act play gives him an enclosed and enclosing locus which can be used to emphasise that psychological clastrophobia which emerges in *Cries and Whispers* as a sense of *paranoia*: Karin is persecuted by precisely the objects which traditionally cluttered up the nineteenth century stage as a guarantee of the play's "realism" — furniture, pictures, cupboards and the like — and we see her sense of oppression culminate in her stabbing herself vaginally with a *wine glass* broken accidentally at the dinner table. The way in which props are used by Bergman to indicate a psychopathology of bourgeois existence is everywhere powerful and subtle. It emerges most obviously as a nausea of *abundance*: Karin, Maria and their husbands are sated by th objects which guaranee their social existence: the lavish dinner courses on silver dishes wheeled out as part of social form, find Karin unable to eat a mouthful. The abundance and waste extends to her clothes: Karin's act of mutilation is preceded by a scene in which, helped by Anna, she divests herself of her evening dress followed by numerous petticoats, slips and underclothes which she leaves in disarray for Anna to pick up, Karin has been literally enbalmed in convention. Again, the enclosed "theatrical" mise-en-scene Bergman uses is a pretext for the searching close-ups which are the film's stylistic hallmark and which define the sense of strain and boredom of bourgeois living in a way that surpasses the technical resources of the stage. The camera pans ceaselessly in close-up past chiming clock which reinforce the psychological agony of waiting: waiting for Agnes's death, waiting for someone or something to bring meaning to the survivor's neurotic, empty lives.

There is yet another way in which Bergman "uses" the conventions of nineteenth century melodrama. From *Hedda Gabler* to *The Three Sisters* to *Saint Joan* the nineteenth century stage offers the great roles to *women:* the violence of these melodramas is articulated through the great set speeches in which actresses were allowed to 'let go' in passion and hyperbole. In *Cries and Whispers* the scenes of most passionate violence — Agnes's death bed, Maria's attempt to 'court' Karin and Karin's response, Anna's reaction to Agnes's ghost — escape the charge of "theatricality" by that theatrically being so precisely assimilated into the mise-en-scene by its being taken account of at source, so to speak, so that it emerges not as directly *expressive* (though it is of course that) but as part of a complex aesthetic code, as a *style* of acting. This sense of a sophisticated understanding of cinematic and theatrical conventions is what makes *Cries and Whispers* superior to Bergman's previous film *The Touch*. It is not a question of one film's being more "intense" or "powerful" than the other: it is a conviction that in *The Touch* Bergman hadn't sufficiently mastered the ideological snares of filming a present day subject. Outside a reconisable genre or convention, the film came across as too blandly realistic: the domestic scenes in Bibi Andersson's house, for instance, scenes in which she hoovered the floor or worked in the kitchen had an unfortunate 'colour supplement' or television commercial flavour, while Eliott Gould as her American archeologist lover couldn't avoid a similarly unfortunate air of having walked in from a soap opera.

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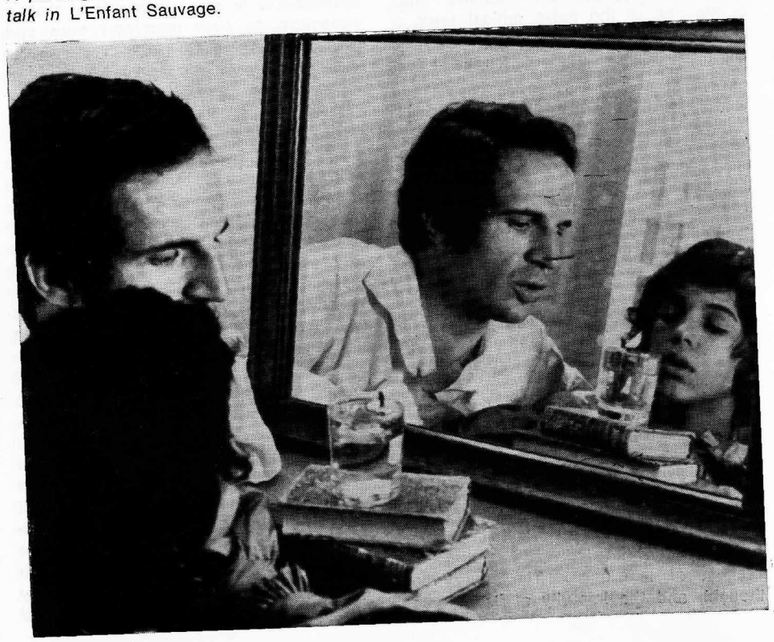
It would be wrong however to see Bergman's formal preoccupation as primarily involved in distantiation or irony: on the contrary, it is part of Bergman's exigence — we can take it or leave it, and it's certainly an unfashionable aesthetic — that we *feel* the violence of his film (a similar ambiguity — very crudely, a debate over the relative 'coolness' and detachment involved in a theoretical perspective — has already been remarked on in Truffaut. Traditional American narrative cinema would also provide a close aesthetic parallel.) Almost by definition, Bergman cannot maintain a formal "distance" when dealing with something as claustrophobic as domestic melodrama. Nor does he choose in the last resort: there is an old-fashioned insistence in Bergman, fundamentally resistant to marxist thinking, that his films embody truths not only about bourgeois society but also about the 'human condition'. The invariable close-ups pointing their relentless gaze on human features, on Liv Ullmann's beauty, Harriet Andersson's worn features, Ingrid Thulin's mask, are not only the stylistic correlative of filming a stage melodrama, but point to more traditional preoccupations — they literally search out *the truth*. Bergman's focus is on fundamental modes of experience which go beyond ideological divisions: in an early scene in *Cries and Whispers* the doctor who visits Agnes presss her abdomen and breast to discover the progress of her illness: it is a gesture that becomes a caress moments later when he fondles his former mistress Maria. Bergman's message at this point is that sex and pain are inseparable *as a fact of human existence*. Hence, the "cries and whispers" of the title, 'offstage" sound effects which punctuate the film while one or other of the women's faces is seen in close up; the sounds consist of an ambiguous sexual whimpering half way between pain and ecstasy, while the faces stare impassively before dissolving with fade out into a red background (instead of the customary black). The red as a matter of fact is rather important: far more even than in *Anne and Muriel* it functions in the mise-en-scene as a field of force aiming to grasp the audience in an unambigious emotional complicity. The scene in Truffaut's film where the screen is filled with the scarlet of Muriel's blood-stained sheet is more than matched by the violence of Karin's smearing her face with the blood of her vaginal wound. Similarly, the contrast between the "literary" death from consumption of Anne in *Anne and Muriel* and the wracked pain of Agnes in *Cries and Whispers,* speaks for itself: the death screams of the latter are offered as so many blows to the complacency of the audience.

To repeat, such an uncompromising aesthetic position is unfashionable, "unmodern". There is an audaciousness here we should attempt to define. Bergman's tendency in *Cries and Whispers* is to modulate the "marxist" (i.e. historical and materialist) implications of using the genre of melodrama towards playing with the transcendental notions of tragedy. This is clearly present in *Persona,* where Liv Ullmann plays an actress whose mental breakdown occurs during a performance of Euripides' *Elektra:* the bare white walls of the psychiatric clinic round which Ullmann paces in a flowing white nightdress should be seen, in contrast to the nineteenth century "clutter" of *Cries and Whispers,* as an attempt to suggest a mise-en-scene suitable for the acting out of a Grecian "tragedy". There is an insistence on tragedy's "universal" relevance which a modern audience may well find unacceptable. There are a few artists who continue to use symbolism — with its implications of a shared, deep-seated cultural heritage — as unambiguously, one is tempted to say as daringly, as Bergman. When ,in the image that the distributors of *Cries and Whispers* use for their publicity, Kari Sylwan strips naked before climbing into Harriet Andersson's bed to caress and comfort her, half the audience will respond as Bergman wishes to the power of this archetypal image of the *pieta*. Such is the cultural fragmentation of modern times, however, that the other half of the audience may find it merely risible. Thus for the time being Bergman offers few concessions to a materialist cinema.

Mark LeFanu

A paradigm of social existence ... Itard (Francois Truffaut) teaching the boy to talk in L'Enfant Sauvage.



Cries and Whispers Sweden 1972 *Dir written and prod* Ingmar Bergman *Phot* Sven Nykvist *Ed* Siv Lundgren *Mus* Bach, Chopin *Cast* Harriet Andersson (Agnes) Ingrid Thulin (Karin) Liv Ullmann (Maria) Kari Sylvan (Anna) Erland Josephson (Doctor) Georg Arlin, Henning Moritzen Anders Ek. *Prod* Cinematograph AB-SFI

WR: Mysteries of the Organism

Yugoslavia/W. Ger. 1971 **Dir** Dusan Makavejev **Ed** Ivan Vulcasović **Phot** Pega Popovic (Yugo) Aleksander Petkovic (USA) **Art Dir** Dragoljub Ivkov **Cast** Milena Dravic (Milena) Jagoda Kaloper (Jagoda) Ivica Vidovic (Vladimir Ilyich) Zoran Radmilovic (Radmilovic) Miodrag Andric (soldier) Tuli Kupferberg (US soldier) Jackie Curtis. **Prod** Neoplanta/Telepol (Novi Sad–Munich) 86 mins.

In Makavejev's second feature, *The Switchboard Operator* (1967), there is a scene where Isabella and Ahmed sit watching television. They are alone, silent in a small room, isolated from the events they observe on the television screen — Russian revolutionaries razing the idols of the Orthodox Church. The relationship between these two realities is complex. On the one hand they are totally separate: a historical manifestation of anti-religious turmoil (as presented in Vertov's *Symphony of the Donbas*), and a (relatively) present-tense private experience. On the other, they comment on each other, and even parallel each other, the tearing down of the spires serving as a hyperbolic analogy for Isabella's seduction of Ahmed; or, (in the retrospective light of *W.R.*), we might say that Isabella's destruction of Ahmed's repressive sexual attitudes is potentially constructive in the way that the razing of archaic religious institutions was an integral part of the Marxist revoluton. The third factor to be noted is the fact that Makavejev uses footage from a Vertov film (the falling spires also recalls scenes in Eisenstein's *October*), thus underlining not merely his ideological roots, but his aesthetic affiliations. This multiplicity of implicaton is characteristic of Makavejev's films, and marks the cast of his intellect as unique, in that it seeks to expand awareness rather than delimit, define, dogmatise. His films create debate, rather than end it.

Makavejev's allegiance to Eisenstein is not marked in *The Switchboard Operator,* apart from oblique references like the one instanced above. More immediately apparent are his affinities with Godard: their common exploration of the minimal experiences of life, their rejection of climaxes that are the clichés of melodrama. Thus in *Masculin-Feminin,* Godard explores (in '15 precise events', like Makavejev's distinctive episodic structure in *The Switchboard Operator*) the 'trivial' moments in the lives of Paul and Madeleine, just as Makavejev presents everyday ephemera, such as the close-up of the kettle boiling on an upturned iron, or the installation of the shower; the surrealist imagery of the motor-bike by the billiard-table and the buttocks/egg dissolve function in a similarly revelatory manner. But the intentions of the two directors are opposed: where Godard finds in the everyday, the trivial, the *lack* of real contact and communication that is reflected in the spatial vacuums and awkwardness of his visual compositions, Makavejev discovers a means of expressing the essence of the intimacy that develops between Isabella and Ahmed. Godard searches for a 'tendresse' that eludes him; it does not elude Makavejev, and one current of his films is concerned both with the expression of it (capturing is fleeing moments — the cat lying on Isabella's naked body), and the location of it in a specific context, a context that includes war and death. Even the fact of Isabella's death cannot diminish the value and beauty of their love. Under a common surface of style and structure, Godard and Makavejev manifest very different thematic preoccupations: 'Godard has placed himself at the service of the revolution. I don't want to serve,' Makavejev has said. This difference in political ardour is concomitant with their different view of the contemporary potentiality for happiness, as is emphasised by Makavejev's *W.R.*: his refusal to preach political dogma is as ineluctable as the final smiling faces of Milena and Reich, his two central protagonists.

Nevertheless, this refusal has led to severe critical attacks on *W.R.,* principally from that portion of the left that understands political seriousness (dogma) as the prerequisite (in a director from the Eastern Bloc) for admission to the Pantheon. And admittedly some of their comments carry authority, (although often at the risk of the naive critical error of attacking Makavejev's intentions 'per se'). Of these attacks, perhaps the most perceptive is Joan Mellen's in *Cinéaste;* interestingly, however, she carries most weight in her observations about Makavejevs handling of the figure of Reich, and the liberating power of sex, rather than in her political comments. These latter derive from a debatable criterion of 'commitment': 'Attempting to inspire a new liberated sensibility through this melange of images, *W.R.* is rendered incoherent because of the ambiguity of its point of view' Mellen equates ambiguity with confusion, but ambiguity is perhaps not the most apposite term. 'Ambivalence' serves better, I think, in relation to *W.R.*, with its more specific connotations: the coexistence of apparently contradictory aspects. In a manner that is almost Borgesian, Makavejev's *W.R.* concerns itself with the discrepancies between the force of a specific moral concept in its pure form *and* its historical degeneration; between the individual and social realms of existence. The purity of thought, and the impurity of its enforcement (enforcement being a crucial term) are perhaps the polarities around which Makavejev explores his specific themes. This was clear even in *The Switchboard Operator,* in the discrepancy between the praiseworthy openness of the ideas expounded by the sexologist, and the sterile, academic manner of their communication. This ambivalence is not the mark of confusion, but of the maturity of a mind that refutes the assertive authority of the 'either . . . or . . .' proposition that remains at the base of Western, and particularly radical, thought. Mellen's tendency obfuscates her perceptions — for instance she writes that 'It is unclear whether Chou, Lin and Mao are to be seen as the liberators or repressers of sensuality. The huge crowd scene suggests conformity, a programmed mass clutching the pre-digested thoughts of their 'chairman', in direct opposition to liberated individuality. But the smiles of the leaders seem benevolent, an expression of positive achievement . . .' The parallel, she goes on to suggest between the Maoist and Stalinist footage is no more than superficial: in clarifying the positive tone of the Maoist scene we have only to note its colour, the strong movement of the crowd (flux, flexibility), against the black-and-white, regimented formalism of the Stalinist episodes. The parallels of paternalistic leaders and programmatic ideology are significant only at a surface level that is insensitive to both emotional tone and structural placing.

Joan Mellen's perceptions are more acute in other areas, however: 'Makavejev ignores the psychiatric view at the heart of Reich (and Freud) that bodily tensions freed in orgiastic release do not yield a permanent liberation unless the original trauma is made conscious and re-experienced.' And she cites the words of Reichian therapist Dr John Pierrakos: 'Reich believed that sexuality should be based on feelings of love, but Makavejev makes no distinction between healthy sexuality and libertinism. He dissociates sex from love.' The result is the simplistic idea 'that free love is a sufficient answer to alienation, that when the revolution abandoned free love, it was lost.'

Uncharacteristically, Makavejev seems indeed to have resorted to simplification in the attempt to crystallise the link between the individual and social realities: maybe it was a risk endemic to the ambitiousness of his project — though it must be admitted that the necessity of love is central in *The Switchboard Operator* and is evidenced in *W.R.* in the death of Milena.

Mellen's other main objection to the film is of more partial relevance, dealing with 'the inauthenticity of lies of ommission': 'We are given a Reich stripped of his early Marxism, of his concern with mass psychology, and his theory of work democracy (workers' control).' While the accuracy of her comment is unquestionable, its validity is mitigated by two factors: firstly, despite its title, the film is not merely a documentary about Reich; and secondly, the material we are given on Reich is subordinated to a larger structural co-ordinate, the dialecic between concept and manifestation. The degeneracy in time of initially 'pure' ideas is central to the film, and is reiterated in Makavejev's presentation of Reich, which contrasts the integrity of his ideas about orgasm with the image of a beleaguered eccentric who pleads that he voted for Eisenhower.

Finally it is Makavejev's method that is the most fascinating aspect of *W.R.* (as it had been in his earlier films), rather than our disagreement or agreement with his ideas. An analysis of Makavejev's method is crucial both for a comprehension of what Makavejev is doing, and what is happening to cinema in a broader sense: the microcosm illuminates the macrocosm. Although (as Robin Wood has pointed out) the structure of *The Switchboard Operator* is an innovation in its apparent schematisation and fragmentation of narrative sequentiality, it is his next film, *Innocence Unprotected* (1968), that is of crucial interest in illuminating the form of *W.R.* Taking as its starting point a creaky, whimsical film, part fiction and part autobiography of a circus strong-man (Aleksic), Makavejev used new, contemporary footage (the original was shot secretly during the war years) of interviews with the original participants; to this he added newsreel footage, and a hand-tinted print of the original. In an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* Makavejev said of Aleksic's script: 'le scenario initial tenait sur un sac de papier, ou était écrit "Amour, compassion, pauvre orpheline, homme riche, bel acrobate, affreuse maratre, bagarre, police, justice, happy end".' To this formidable catalogue or the standard ingredients of kitsch melodrama, Makavejev contributes the authority of a benevolently critical paternalism, enlarging the areas of significance of the original film (which Makavejev retains almost in its entirety) by judicious cutting in extra material which through parallels or conflicts with other images, demands our emotional or intellectual engagement with Aleksic and his naive, simplistic story: his story becomes, in its new context, a metaphor for folk melodrama that, through its juxtaposition with newsreel material of the 'real world', and interviews with its heroes and heroines twenty years later, incarnates the very spirit of the Yugoslav people themselves. It generates an atmosphere of generosity and beneficient humanism, and elevates Aleksic to the status of a paradigmatic hero. At the same time the larger context is an inherently critical placing of the 'B' movie genre: for all its fantasising, and charm, it is the portrayal of an irreality that might not be healthy. The 'judgements' posited by the film are multifarious, often apparently incompatible: but, as I've already suggested, such multiplicity and apprehension of paradox is one of the defining characteristics of Makavejev's art; and it expression is facilitated by his grasp of Eisenstein's 'montage as collision . . . as conflict' principles. Some of the cutting creates an ambiguity that derives largely from the temporal confusion, as when we see Aleksic performing a stunt in 1940, then we see him attempting the same stunt (in colour) in 1968: do we admire his continuing strength, laugh at the ludicrousness of his stunt outside the specific context it was created for, or do we merely feel a sense of mortality, of impending age that will end these stunts? Through the simple temporal juxtapositions, and elision of fictional and documentary forms, Makavejev utilises the theoretical propositions first formulated by Eisenstein (to whom he has also acknowledged his delight in the surreal: 'Rappelez-vous cette séquence de *La Grève* où les policiers à cheval sont sur les balions. Les qualités surréalistes se trouvent dans la réalité.') And Makavejev's use of footage by Alexandrov (the circus cannon), commenting on the influence of the American cinema on the Russians, ('Circus était l'un de ces "musicals" réalistes-socialistes') both, like the use of Vertov in *The Switchboard Operator,* offers homage to the Russian masters, and, in the Alexandrov instance, casts a quizzical, cynical eye forward to the 'Socialist art in Czarist costume' critique of *W.R.*

In many respects *WR* is a summation of the concerns of *The Switchboard Operator* and *Innocence Unprotected* (I have not seen *Man is not a Bird* [1966]) but its structure is more complex, less easily classified. Fundamentally the film manipulates documentary and archive material surrounding the life and work of Wilhelm Reich in America and a fictional story set in Yugoslavia;* within this double-structure, and acting to break down barriers between them, are 'appearances' by a number of the New York 'avant-garde' (Tuli Kupferberg, Jackie Curtis etc), and some Russian archive footage, from Chiaurelli's *The Vow* (1971), in which Gelovani plays Stalin. Whereas the inter-relations of segments in *Innocence Unprotected* (however rich in implication) was simple, (old film/old film's actors in present/historical archive material/Makavejev's own interpretative hand-tinting), the inter-relationships of *WR* are challengingly complex. The material on Reich, for instance, involves contemporary interviews with his associates, and his second wife; it uses archive footage of Reich; it uses his recorded voice over contemporary visuals. The evasion of dogmatic assertion in this exploratory method is evidence of Makavejev's desire to ask questions, not present answers. But the problem is that, of course, Makavejev cannot avoid making statements, especially when he uses an abrasive montage as the root of his art; because collision implies a result, and if Makavejev has engineered the collision, we must presume he intended the result. One example: Eva Reich-Moise says 'The American Dream is dead', and Makavejev cuts in a Coca-Cola jingle, living evidence of the American Dream, 'Coke is the way it should be, the real thing, Coca-Cola, that's the way it is . . .' etc. Similarly Makavejev is critical of Reich himself: he is described as drawing a gun on people — pretty ironical for one whose researches and theories were preaching anti-repression! One can only assume his orgasms weren't as fine as those of his converts? And the intercutting of Orgone Therapy patients with Nazi 'euthanasia' victims is critical in visual terms (through parallel), though on 'intellectual' terms we may say that the similar outward physical manifestations hide very different interiors — spiritual/physical release on the one hand, spiritual/physical repression on the other. This sort of ambivalence is recurrent in the film, and results not from confusion, but from the recognition of an inherent paradox in the sort of demands made by the state, or social unit, and those made by the individual.

The philosophical tightrope that Makavejev treads is one which recognises the ultimate disparity between individual and state; it is this disparity that precludes the possibility of isolating a positive intellectual base, a concrete and a specific 'statement' of attitude or belief. And the disparity is presented it terms of sex/the individual and politics/the state; (even this equation is prone to caustic, ironic reversals). Makavejev's 'statement' is, finally, the sum of the film's contradictions and juxtapositions; and many of these may be unconscious juxtapositions, the result of the intuitive painterly attitudes that Makavejev works by when compounding his films, rather than conscious, rational, dialectical oppositions *WR* is as much the manifestation of the interior consciousness of Makavejev, as it is the exterior intellectualisations of Makavejev the film-maker. The only statement we may make, is that Makavejev's film concerns the rights of the individual above the demands of the state: 'Tout le monde participe au mouvement social, mais on n'est pas obligé d'être toujours en groupe. L'individualisme, c'est l'amour, c'est le droit à être fou, c'est le droit aux conflits personnels.'

However, my present concern is the structure of the film as an 'art-object', as a self-validating, cohesive experience; in particular the ways in which Makavejev has absorbed and expanded on the aesthetic contributions of Eisenstein and Godard. I have already commented on

* The best simple sequential account of the film is David Robinson's prosaically useful piece in Sight & Sound vol 40 no 4, Autumn 1971.

Makavejev's use of montage, but it is worth noting that Makavejev's montage is not one of static images (as *Strike* was, fundamentally), but a montage of mise-en-scène, a juxtaposition of moving images, of narrative invention and newsreel documentary that extends the essentially (frigid) propagandist purpose of Eisenstein to a witty humaneness of response that involves the co-existence of an existential pessimism (Godard) and a *potential optimism* (*Renoir*). For the 'heroine', Milena, is smiling, with Reich, at the end, yet her death is an inevitability, a result of an egocentric humanitarianism that is never a match for the fascistic 'mass-credo' epitomised in Vladimir Ilyich, the ice-skater. (Another example of Makavejev's irony is the fact that despite her avowed sexual freedom, Milena's attitude to Radmilovic — 'the worker' — is both patronising and near-repressive.) Her impending doom is unequivocally stated in the scene in which Milena shows Vladimir a photograph of Hitler surrounded by adoring women; they wheel balletically around the room, the photo clasped between them. Vladimir's dancing/skating has already been identified as 'decadent' (our first view of him is through the huge pink feather hats of his fellow skaters), as repressed sexuality, and Milena's adoring gaze upon Vladimir is a sombrely witty parallel to the expression upon the faces of Hitler's women. The parallel of Vladimir and Hitler is explicit, and Milena's impending death inescapable.

Makavejev's debt to Eisenstein is to the early theoretical writings that advanced the concept of montage as a dialectical principle, not a narrative procedure; montage as collision, not linkage; also Eisenstein's concern with non-diegetic material as a force for crystallising thematic motifs has been influential on the younger director, whose hard satiric edge and abrasive humour (born of juxtaposition) reflects the spirit of the young Eisenstein. They have a common concern with caricature, and the grotesque, but Makavejev's tend to be real (Jackie Curtis, Tuli Kupferberg) as much as fictional (Vladimir Ilyich). But the crucial distinction between Makavejev and Eisenstein (and this also defines Makavejev's *advance* on Eisenstein) comes in their central, self-confessed intentions, the purpose to which they put their technique: Eisenstein's work was increasingly orientated toward stylistic syncretism, the total fusion of the forces generated by sound and image, the synchronicity of colour, thought, music. In contradistinction, Makavejev's method is one of antinomic conflict, even occasionally in regard to the relationship between *sound and image*. Makavejev's use of sound owes much to Godard challenging the status of what we *see*, though it is usually more subdued than the querulous confrontations of Godard. For instance, the plaster-casting of *Screw* editor Tim Buckley's penis is distinguished not merely by the outrageously kitsch flowery sofa on which Buckley reclines, or the witty cutting in of the narcissistic Jackie Curtis crossing herself at a 'shrine': the musical accompaniment moves from the airy triviality of light classical to 'Kill for Peace', and then, as the plaster touches the penis, a Tchaikovsky-like portentousness sweeps in: its fraudulent weightiness exposes the melodramatic aspect of the plastercasting, while also being a simple pastiche on the way a skin-flick director might handle the sequence: the irony is two-way. Makavejev's economical debunking of 'the media' is here a nice by-product of the way in which he examines and questions *our* response to the event on the screen. Thus Makavejev's use of the soundtrack doesn't, as in Godard, directly deny the reality-status of the image, but tends rather to impose a critical activity, an abrasive wit that enlarges one's response rather than limiting it in a reductive manner.

Makavejev's artistic affiliations are more to the surrealists than to the social-realists. Unlike Eisenstein, whose montage technique was essentially limited to the conflict of ideas within successive images or shots (or at most the sequence), Makavejev's montage reverberates through the whole film, leaving an impression of collage, rather than sequential montage. The connection between disparate images is often independent of the diegetic evolution. Thus we note a parallel between Radmilovic's spurting hose, and the magisterial fountain behind Tuli Kupferberg at one point as he prowls Manhattan; there is a cryptic similarity between the orgone therapy patient who clutches idolatrously at Dr Lowe's hand held tantalisingly above her, and the women looking lovingly at Hitler. Indeed Makavejev's structural method falls into two broad categories: syntagmatically (sequentially) it is based on conceptual parallels rather than contradictions; paradigmatically it is based on conceptional parallels rather than contradictions.

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On his appearance in the film, Radmilovic comments of the red bourgeoisie, 'All they care about is food, fashion and Max Factor', recalling the words that appear near the end of *Masculin-Feminin*. "This film could be called the children of Marx and Coca-Cola. Understand who will" Makavejev understands, and *WR* brilliantly exploits the disintegrating distinction between fact and fiction to create a fusion between the initially separate worlds of America and Eastern Europe. Godard has consistently found new ways of expressing his awareness of film as a non-reality (both as hardware, and as a medium of illusion utilising actors). One instance is the opening of *Deux ou Trois Choses . . .*, in which the 'heroine' is twice introduced to us by the narrator, making us aware of the coexistent oneness and separateness of Marina Vlady (address) and Juliette Janson (fictional character). Similarly the credit sequence of *WR* involves three of its fictional characters (although they are called by their real names — Milena, Radmilovic, Jagoda) sliding the yoke of an egg from hand to hand until, covered in yolk, they stare (knowingly, insolently, happily) into the camera with an 'know you're watching me' look on their faces, that almost challenges our voyeurism. Still, that is no *advance* on Godard. What is an advance, though, is the complex interweaving or fictional and documentary material (and the interweaving of past and present) that finally blurs our awareness of any distinction between the two. There is newsreel footage; there are contemporary interviews; there are theatrical grotesques (Jackie Curtis, symbolising for Makavejev the 'loss of identity' of contemporary America — or of Russia) and the 'happening' of Tuli Kupferberg, whose antics pre-exist in an art-object (the aesthetics of the street happening are committed to the destruction of distinctions between art and life), and yet are as *real* as Jackie Curtis sucking an ice-cream in the street. The boundaries dissolve in mid-Atlantic, until we reach the apparently clear-cut fictional figures in the Yugoslavian narrative. But again the issue is complicated by the incorporation of archive material, and Vladimir Ilyich's real-life ice-ballet company; the distinctions blur again when we realise that the archive footage of Stalin is not Stalin, but an actor playing Stalin, whose fictive existence is external to the fictive substance of *WR* itself, thus creating a gentle ironic commentary on this fusion of forms.

At another point in the film, Makavejev cuts to a static aerial view of New York — then tracks out to reveal it is only a poster, (another illusion of reality), and that in fact we are in Yugoslavia, while Vladimir pontificates about 'the overrated West'. Just as fact and fiction fuse, so do the differences between East and West, and Makavejev transcends the ephemera of ideological squabbling through the brilliantly inventive flexibility of his visual imagination, and forces us to consider art as a meaningful and integral part of our daily existence.

Godard's apprehension of the rift between art and life led him to formulate his theories of why and how traditional cinematic forms can only reinforce the bourgeois ideological and economic foundations of our society. Hence his more recent work has consistently denied the audience its expectations of 'entertainment' and has confronted us with the incompatability of bourgeois structures and revolutionary morality. The rigorous intellectual (political) logic of his mind is very different from the equally challenging procedures of Makavejev. The destruction of the bourgeois cinematic structures is inherent in, contained within, the new 'interiorised' structuring of Makavejev's conglomerate materials. The simplicity of the old narrative forms is ruptured by the introduction of 'alien' cinematic elements, yet the whole remains 'entertainment' of the first order: most significantly it is entertainment that demands to be taken as inextricably intervowen with the very fabric of our lives, that it affect our relationships with the world, rather than anaesthetise them.

Martin Walsh

Frenzy

Great Britain 1972 **Dir** and **Pr** Alfred Hitchcock **Sc** Antony Schaffer **Phot** Gil Taylor **Ed** John Jympson **Art Dir** Robert Laing **Pr Des** Sydney Cain **Cast** John Finch (Richard Blaney) Barry Foster (Bob Rusk) Anna Massey (Babs Milligan) Barbara Leigh-Hunt (Brenda Blaney) Alec McCowen (Inspector Oxford) Vivien Merchant (Mrs Oxford) Bernard Cribbins (Forsythe) **Prod** Alfred Hitchcock for Universal 116 mins.

In the light of *Frenzy*'s apparent failure to win popular acclaim, there is a certain irony surrounding the grandiose rhetoric of its opening sequence — Hitchcock bearing down on the city of his beginnings, celebrating his own return with a triumphal march and a majestic procession down the Thames to Tower Bridge. It may be an appriopriately Hitchcockian irony that this grand homecoming should be followed by an uncomfortable silence, an ironic reversal of the expected such as he himself so often engineers, but it makes the point that *Frenzy* is an uncomfortable film and poses the critical question, why? The familiar features are, perhaps all too obviously, there — the counterpoint of macabre juxtapositions, the striking effects of emotional manipulation, the powerful pessimistic vision — but the overall pattern remains elusive. There is something factitious, even laboured about the composition of the individual parts. Struck by the literary echoes of the opening scene — London, the river, and a floating corpse — the hasty critic is tempted to repeat Henry James' verdict on another late work by master hand, *Our Mutual Friend:* "it is poor with the poverty not of momentary embarassment, but of permanent exhaustion. It is wanting in inspiration . . . it is dug out as with a spade and pickaxe." Yet James' criticism has not worn well, and Hitchcock has been prematurely written off too often to allow one to dismiss him simply by an unfavourable comparision with earlier work.

The thematic continuity *Frenzy* displays with earlier works is plain enough. Blaney and Rusk act out the drama of wronged innocence and exchanged guilt that is by now familiar (see *The Wrong Man, I Confess* etc.). Wrongful accusation and sentence arouse in Blaney a homicidal impulse of revenge which equates him morally with the killer and involves him in the latter's guilt. This involvement at the same time extends to the audience who become, so to speak, accomplices of the attempted crime by responding sympathetically to the powerful emotional justification of Blaney's desire for revenge. The theme thus both offers considerable scope for Hitchcock's characteristic deployment of cinematic art to control and manipulate his audience's emotions, and also serves to dramatize his vision of the fragility of civilized order, of the swift and arbitrary way in which order may be perverted into chaos, reason into unreason, ordinariness into evil. This sense of the lurking horror that stalks all life is at the heart of this film as it has been of so many others, and it is expressed in a range of different modes from the brutally dramatic (the strangling), through the macabre (the body in the potatoes), to the uncomfortably repulsive (the dishes served up by the inspector's wife).

The Necktie Murders . . . Barbara Leigh-Hunt as reluctant victim.

If this chilling insight is itself not new to Hitchcock, what sets *Frenzy* slightly apart from predecessors such as *The Birds* is the sickening insistence and the disturbing levity with which it is elaborated. His vision has darkened with age and in a particular way; the macabre has become physically nauseating and his response a mirthless laugh; Sartrean nausea is mixed with comedy as bleak as Beckett's. Thus a bowl of fish soup can project something like the naked obscenity of existence in the context of an absurdly comic and trivial domestic situation — a bored housewife's attempt to master a sophisticated cuisine. That this juxtaposition of the profoundly repulsive and the trivially comic has a disturbing effect is clear, but it seems to have no purpose beyond that effect. Instead of heightening or qualifying each other by their proximity, the two elements simply coexist in an uneasy tension, cohabiting as disturbingly as the barmaid's corpse and the potatoes.

There may, therefore, be a continuity and a sense of continuing development about Hitchcock's vision, but this alone cannot provide *Frenzy* with a coherent structure. *The Wrong Man* theme lies too obviously on the surface to give any coherence in depth to the film, while the relationship between Blaney and Rusk, although it suggests the possibility of psychological exploration, is too perfunctorily treated to have any significance as a study of a dual personality, of character and alter ego. Instead, then, of searching for a crucial pattern in terms of theme or character, it may be better to begin by examining certain of the striking formal features of *Frenzy* in order to make sense of the whole.

Probably the most arresting feature of all is the camera's slow, silent retreat down the empty staircase after following Rusk and his next victim, the barmaid, up to the door of his flat. The sequence becomes something like a paradigm of Hitchcock's art as the camera tracks back and back, and out into Covent Garden to show the market about its daily business, to show a world that can no longer be taken at its innocent face-value since we are now aware of the horror that lurks behind its bland exterior. But more importantly, the sequence is a vir-

Macabre realism . . . Rusk (Barry Foster) dealing with an intransigent corpse

tuoso feat of audience manipulation, a form of cinematic coitus interruptus; led on by recollection of an earlier sequence where Hitchcock had held us in suspense and then released us with a scream (the scream of discovery as the secretary finds the first body), we await a climax of horror, or at least the sounds of violence. But the climax never comes. The consummation of violence and the attendant release of psychic tension are witheld, with the result that that tension is correspondingly heightened and carried over into the subsequent course of the action. Once again the effect is disturbing, indeed frustrating, and Hitchcock adds to the frustration in later scenes: the outcome of Blaney's trial is, for instance, withheld from us by a soundproof glass-panelled door, behind which we can see the trial coming to an end but through which we cannot hear the verdict. By such sequences as these our psychic energy is, so to speak, dammed up behind a wall of frustration, forcing us to identify ever more closely with the frustrated Blaney — a victim of events just as we are victims of their mode of narration — until, when the violent release finally comes, the full force of our pent-up energy is behind the frenzied blows he smashes onto the figure in the bed. The consummation is finally achieved, all the more violent for its long delay and all the more terrible in its aftermath of cold realization.

This technique of frustration thus functions as a typically Hitchcockian means of involving, incriminating, us in the central drama of the film; of manipulating us into acknowledgement of our own potential violence, and of delivering us a sharp moral rebuke for expecting and wanting to witness another murder. What is more, it underlines the equation of violence with sexuality already present in the actions of the psychopathic Rusk, for whom sex takes the form of homicidal assault. Gratification comes through violence both for the murderer and for the audience, and in teasingly delaying the climax Hitchcock creates an intensity of desire in his audience which matches the vengeful frenzy of his frustrated heroes. The equation of sex and violence could thus be said to extend to Hitchcock's use of something like a sexual technique to perpetrate a form of violence on his audience. It has become a facet of style as well as a thematic concern.

Hitchcock's concern with the theme is, in fact, almost obsessive, to the extent that *Frenzy* could be described as the culminating expression of a puritan streak that runs through most of his work. He is, of course, no prude, but a distaste for, or suspicion of, sexuality can be clearly discerned in, for instance, the imaginative sympathy he has extended to a long line of frigid heroines. *Marnie* is a late and pertinent example, for it is precisely the fear of sex as murderous violence that is at the root of Marnie's neurotic personality. In her eyes sex and love are incompatible, eros necessarily excludes caritas, the red is opposed to the white; and the story of her cure is the process by which these false oppositions are overcome and the wholeness of her life restored. Thus *Frenzy* takes what in *Marnie* was a neurotic obsession, a personal aberration, and raises it to the level of an objective insight. Sexual desire **is**, directly or indirectly, violent and destructive: the sexually active male is a predatory beast and the female his helpless prey. London is littered with the victims of a ruthless appetite which, as the early sequence by the Thames suggests, pollutes civilization itself.

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To say this is to imply that the lines of moral judgement are clearly drawn, but one of the difficulties of *Frenzy* is, in fact, the ambiguity of Hitchcock's stance. Certainly, civilization is here the domain of the female; women have assumed the dominant social role. Blaney is taken out to dinner by his wife and provided with pocketmoney: a large, commanding woman and a small, meek man descend the stairs of the marriage-bureau, happy in their unequal union: when Blaney and the barmaid are accosted in the park by a former R.A.F. friend, the camera moves up and away to zoom in on the stern figure of the latter's wife, high up in a glass-fronted tower-block, gazing down from this fortress of modern civilization on the husband she dominates and Blaney whom she mistrusts, despises, and finally ejects. It is the women who represent civilized order (and this idea is parodied in the inspector's wife and her attempts at haute cuisine), while the energetic, impulsive male is a parasite and an outcast. Yet, of course, it is on the side of the outcast that the film sympathetically engages: the heavily emphasized violence of Blaney's character appears as a legitimate response to a frustrating predicament, whilst even Rusk invites a certain sympathy in his struggle with the corpse-woman perversely dominant even after death. And were the police inspector to strangle his wife, it would scarcely seem more than she deserves.

So where does Hitchcock take his stand? Is he inveighing against the destuctive violence of male sexuality, or is he rather rebelling against the "monstrous regiment of women" in an emasculated civilization? The ambiguity goes right through the film, culminating in the black comedy of the dénouement. The inspector watches Blaney vent his violence on the body in the bed, which turns out to be not Rusk but his latest female victim and then both watch while Rusk enters noisily with a large black trunk to dispose of the body. There is no violence between the men; no word of recrimination or accusation is passed, merely a facetious comment from the inspector about Rusk having forgotten his necktie. Grouped around the trunk, the three men stand like accomplices around a coffin, partners in guilt, forming a club-like masculine conspiracy against the feminine world — a world represented by the strangled corpse on the bed, a grotesque caricature of blond, bosomy femininity. The woman is physically repulsive, just as the men are morally repugnant, and if Hitchcock's attitude is ambiguous here, the ambiguity can be resolved by interpreting his condemnation as indiscriminate and universal. It is a disturbing ending to a disturbing film, and the explanation for this particular quality seems to lie finally in the nihilistic implications of Hitchcock's vision. It is not only civilized society but life itself that withers under his ruthless scrutiny, and the only mitigation he offers is a humourless laugh. The moralist has given way to the nihilist whose art consists in the violent manipulation of his audience and a composition of different shades of black.

John Rignall

Tristana

Italy/France/Spain 1970 **Dir** Luis Bunuel **Sc** Julio Alejandro from a novel by Benito Perez Galdos **Phot** José F Aguayo **Ed** Pedro del Rey **Art Dir** Enrique Alarcon **Cast** Catherine Deneuve (Tristana) Fernando Rey (Don Lope) Franco Nero (Horacio) Lola Gaos (Saturna) Jesus Fernandez (Saturno) Antonio Casas, Vincente Solar, Fernando Cabrian, Candido Losado **Prod** Corona (Paris)/Selenia Cine Prod D.S. (Rome)/Epoca Talia Film (Madrid) 105 mins.

Tristana is clear yet subtle, forceful but oblique, witty yet profound, compassion-oblique, witty yet profound, compassionate yet merciless, grave even in the midst of its humour, incomparable in the precise, even perfection of its mise en scene. *Tristana* is that rare thing: an absolutely flawless masterpiece, where every single detail bears the imprint of the director and where it is impossible to even begin to think in terms of a gap between intention and realisation, since it is in the very intricacy of the mise en scène that Bunuel's conception is deepened and fully actualised. In a context where critical standards remain highly unstable and where the deck of pantheon films is endlessly reshuffled and reconstituted it is all the more necessary to insist on the greatness of *Tristana*: both to isolate it as the key film of the contemporary era and as the work that has done most to advance the art of cinema, and to assert that in the whole history of the film medium perhaps only *Ivan the Terrible* and *La Règle du Jeu* are worthy of standing alongside it. On this it is necessary to be as merciless as Bunuel himself.

Is it accidental that, of the films I have named, both *Ivan* and *Tristana* were made under conditions of political censorship? Bunuel, of course, chose to work in such a context voluntarily and to turn the ostensible drawbacks to his advantage. On the evidence of these films, censorship can serve as a positive stimulus since it forces the artist to adopt more complex ways of encoding references into his work and to avoid obvious allegorical methods. When censorship is out in the open and operates with certain ground rules the writer or film maker at least knows where he stands and can procede accordingly; in the ostensibly freer context of Western bourgeois democracy censorship can often spread its net more widely, since it is worked by a diversity of agencies and masked by aesthetic and commercial criteria. The official objection to an English *Tristana*, could one exist, would be that it was a bad film and poor commercial proposition. This situation effectively paralyses art, for the artist does not know what is permitted because he does not know what is forbidden; he fritters away his energy in a vain effort to please and to satisfy nebulous and phantasmagorical requirements, whose decisive characteristic is that they can neither be satisfied nor defined. Art itself becomes the realm of the nebulous: confused, mystical and ultimately irrelevant, since it dare not have any specific referent.

Tristana does have a referent, which is Spain, Spanish history and, in particular, the period in the thirties leading up to the seizure of power by Franco and the Fascists, with the support of Germany and Italy. To interpret *Tristana* means, effectively, to make explicit all the encoded references to Spanish politics in the picture. However, within the context of contemporary criticism, the problem then arises as to what exactly is the status of these references? Are they a kind of bonus to Galdos' novel? Since the correspondance between the events in the film and Spanish history is not complete, in the sense of not being a straightforward allegory, are we to assume that *Tristana* falls short of being a completely political film, while at the same time cluttering up its treatment of social and psychological themes by forcing us to experience it against a background of confused and unarticulated political static and interference?

What I want to argue is that *Tristana* creates a problem because it clearly reveals the limitations of Western aesthetics. Western theories of art provide no adequate understanding of what art is or why it is meaningful. This is essentially because they are theories of correspondence or non-correspondence. The demand for realism or naturalism or verisimilitude, the holding up of mirror to nature, is in fact homologous with the conception of allegory: both imply a point by point resemblance between the work of art and its subject; yet if this is the case, it is difficult to see how a work of art can ever say or mean anything, how it is possible for it to convey an attitude or a point of view. Romantic and post-Romantic theories of art do not succeed in escaping from this dilemma: either some kind of correspondence is predicted between the soul of the poet and the external world; or the notion that art is a lamp, illuminating the darkness, and that the poet is a person posessing special visions or insights leads eventually to symbolism and the cutting off of art from any kind of referent. Thus, the mirror/lamp antithesis, put forward as some kind of eternal and ineluctable dichotomy, prevents us from seeing something very obvious: which is that works of art are a form of discourse. They are able to refer to things outside themselves and to significate precisely because the relation is not complete, because it does not have the character of equivalence. There is no necessary antithesis between a realism that has nothing to say and a symbolism that has nothing to talk about; it is the autonomy of *Tristana*, its liberation from a correspondence with actual events, which makes it all the more effective as a comment upon them. These references are not separable from some hypothetical universal human meaning but are absolutely integral to any meaning it can possibly have.

The appositeness of Galdos's novel to Bunuel's purpose is well suggested by the passage cited by Ricardo Munoz Suay in *Cahiers du Cinema* (no 223); a description of Toledo:

'En entrant dans la ville par ce côté, le voyageur oublie qu'il est venue dans un véhicule des temps moderne. Son aspect est celui des villages morts, mort pour ne jamais renaître, sans autre intérêt que les souvenirs, sans espoir d'une vie nouvelle, sans rien qui puisse se développer de nouveau . . .'

In Bunuel's film Toledo becomes an image of old Spain; a fitting setting for the pathology of decrepitude, senescence and decay, Bunuel's study in a dying culture. Doubtless he must have relished the irony by which *Tristana* became an acceptable subject — in J. Francisco Aranda's account:

'it was finally decided that *Tristana* would be the best: Spanish in character and in the problems it dealt with, not too complicated. The author of the original book — a Liberal of the end of the past century — was beginning to be officially praised. His work, till recently considered dangerous was now acceptable with the "new look" the Government wanted to give to their future activities.'

By translating the action of the book from 19th century to the period leading up to the Spanish civil war Bunuel was able to raise the question of the relation of this traditional culture to the development of Fascism, and, in turn, to suggest an unbroken continuity right up to the present. Thus, whatever historians have, or are likely to conclude, it seems highly significant that directors of quite different outlooks from the three main countries in which Fascism became established, Germany, Italy and Spain should have arrived at essentially similar conclusions. The strategy of Straub in *Not Reconciled,* of Bertolucci in *The Spider's Strategy,* of Bunuel in *Tristana,* is to break down the distinction between past and present, to portray Fascism only as the most malignant symptom of a deep-seated disease. In all three pictures Fascism is, as it were, the absent subject — the mystification of presenting it as a purely external force invading a wholly innocent organism (and thus of denying any relation between class, capitalism and the development of Fascism), of melodramatising it, is consequently avoided. In Bunuel's case this is strongly reinforced by the fact that every one of the characters commits his own act of betrayal — though, naturally, without ever noticing it!! The meaning of the action is built, not out of the characters conscious decisions but out of everything that is omitted and passed over: the Spanish political situation. Tristana herself is clearly a symbol of Spain, Don Lope is representative of the traditional class society and of the forces that aligned themselves with Franco, Horacio relates to the anti-bourgeois left, while Saturno figures as a caricature of the Spanish working class. Syntagmic juxta-

positions make this political dimension explicit. Tristana's seduction by Don Lope is immediately followed by shots of sabre carrying policemen pursuing workers. Later her rejection of Saturno's pathetic advances — she condescendingly displays her body — is linked by Bunuel with a shot of the Virgin Mary, as she legitimises her relationship with Don Lope in church in order to gratify the ecclesiastical authorities. Once again authoritarian culture is identified with sexual repression. Again the episode in which Tristana walks with Saturna in the streets of Toledo clearly seems to have political overtones. Their choice of streets is the choice that Spain must herself make politically — one path leads to Horacio — i.e. to the left with its somewhat naive and uncritical idealisation of the peasantry (the two men with a donkey, one in Catalan costume that he is painting), the other path to a policeman who is killing a mad dog i.e. Fascism. Perhaps this juxtaposition also suggests the treatment of Catalonia by Franco's army. Moreover, the fact that construction work is going on in the cloister implies that it is the Fascists who are modernising just as the left is attaching itself to 'the picturesque'. *Land Without Bread* is clear evidence that Bunuel would have no sympathy with any attempt to see Spanish history in those terms.

The return to Lope's house unmistakeably represents the defeat of revolutionary forces in Spain and the acquiescence of Spain in Franco's regime. In the coded language of the film this is due to: the lack of determination on the part of the revolutionary left, the apathy and lack of ideological awareness on the part of the working class (the fact that Saturno is deaf and dumb), the traditionalism of Spain (Tristana's feeling that Don Lope's house is where she belongs), the fatal assumption that the battle was already won. The scenes at Don Lope's are rich in irony and full of sly references back to earlier Bunuel films. The expensive piano on which Tristana plays Chopin's Revolutionary Etude — invokes the piano, symbol of a dying culture, which the hero drags behind him in *L'Age D'Or*. Tristana's confinement in the house recalls the plight of the guests in *The Exterminating Angel*; while Horacio's visits between 4 and 6, recall Belle de Jour's attendance of the brothel between 2 and 5. Tristana's mysterious illness, her loss of a limb becomes a metaphor for contemporary Spain. The amputation refers to the military and police state 'solution' for the problems of a nation that is destroying itself from within.

Thus the movie contains a multiplicity of references to Spanish politics; however, it cannot be interpreted rigidly as an allegory. Bunuel is well aware that individuals cannot adequately stand for whole social classes and to try to achieve In Bunuel's work religious, political and sexual implications are invariably linked: they cannot be regarded as alternative methods of explanation nor can one of these be seen as 'standing for' another. Since the symbol integrates these meanings they cannot be separated in analysis. In *Tristana* the bell is a symbol of Spain's traditional and dying authoritarian culture: it integrates the activities of society, it teaches obedience. It is also associated with sexual repression (the phallic symbolism of the giant clapper that cannot be moved). The image which Tristana sees of Don Lope's head crystallises these implications of death: it points forward to the murder of Lope, it metaphorically conveys the spiritual death which she acquiesces in. Don Lope's head is the death mask of Spain: this concentrated and powerful image condenses at the very start the significance of the whole film.

In *Tristana* Bunuel indicates that his characters live their lives on the basis of a false conception of freedom. Don Lope most characteristically represents the hypocrisy of bourgeois society, where freedom is defined as fully accepting and acquiescing in the actual unfreedom of that society. Thus Don Lope purports to mock the institution of marriage and insists that she should retain her freedom, but he becomes indignant when she begins to act on his advice. All through the film Bunuel shows that such 'freedom' as there is clearly rests on *force majeur* or on class position. Tristana's preference for one street rather than another is not an innocent one, for her preference enters into consideration in a way that Saturna's does not. On the basis of some of Bunuel's other films it should be easy to conclude that the recurrent moments of choice for Tristana, between two peas, between two columns, represent authentic if marginal expressions of freedom — one thinks of Archibaldo's decision not to kill the insect at the end of *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo De la Cruz*. However, the total context of *Tristana* makes it absolutely certain that this is not so. Rather it is a sign that Tristana is unwilling to ever enter into a serious or personal commitment and these moments which she endows with such significance are a form of self deception — they lead to the childlike eagerness with which, as a pampered cripple, she enters into games of chance in the park. This self deception is also prominent in Horacio and Don Lope. Horacio affects to be an artist, a radical and a freethinker but he is objectively unwilling and incapable of standing up to the bourgeoisie. He imagines that it will be enough to overcome Don Lope by symbolic action — by knocking him over — he does not see that gestures alone are not enough and that if he wants Tristana he must fight for her and make a positive commitment. Yet Tristana herself *chooses* the inauthentic, not once, but twice — when she allows Don Lope to be her lover and when she eventually returns to Don Lope's house.

At this point it is probably necessary to draw attention to some of the explicit points of contact between the action and such an equivalence would be to falsify the film in both sides of this relation. The tragedy, or comedy, of *Tristana* is that Bunuel allows his characters the freedom to align themselves with one side or the other. And what we see is not the transformation of society but the transformation of individuals. Don Lope talks of siding with the underdog, when he allows a thief to escape, but he objectively sides with the forces of reaction and spends his last hours in the company of the priests, at whom he has scoffed. Horacio, whose posture of the rebel was never entirely convincing (his prurient reaction to Tristana's disclosures), becomes a respectable, impotent bourgeois. Tristana loses her freshness and innocence and becomes hard, cruel and vindictive. Tristana kills Don Lope — but this action cannot turn back the clock; the failure to choose freedom has been catastrophic. Bunuel has never abandoned the surrealist path: he insists that the choice between liberation and repression is an absolute one and that the failure to make a radical break cannot but have destructive implications.

Food and possessions are important in the picture because they are a more truthful indicator of social differences and real motivations that the utterances of the characters themselves. There is no more striking depiction of the transformation of Don Lope than in the contrast between the scene in which Don Lope allows Tristana to eat the only egg (significantly emphasised by a close-up) and that in which he sits at ease, drinking chocolate with the priests, as they sound him out about his will. It is for the right to eat *marron glacés* rather than the bellringer's humble meal of fried bread that counter-revolutions are made. If the characters of *Tristana* fall, they nevertheless fall comfortably — perhaps the apple which Tristana hands Saturno is an emblem of precisely that.

In the inevitably prosaic task of explication it is difficult to bring out the subtlety of Bunuel's effects and to the poetic density of his mise en scene. The scene in the colonnade is a case in point. Don Lope expounds his false freedom, Tristana hers — yet the costume and hat which she wears, and for which Don Lope has sold his valuable silver, contradict this verbal justification. When Tristana bends over the ecclesiastical statue the colour of her hat perfectly matches the patina of the marble: the image conveys the fact that Tristana chooses death, death against life — and the statue reminds her of Lope's slippers — another symbol of decrepitude, ageing and death. This shot subtly reinforces the image we have already been given — of Lope's decapitated head swinging from the bell tower. *Tristana* is characterised by an intricacy and complexity of reference for which there is simply no parallel in the history of the cinema, yet this is achieved quite unobtrusively, without in any way detracting from the work's directness, clarity and force.

If to the inattentive eye and inaccurate heart Bunuel's theme becomes invisible, if *Tristana* can be praised without even being understood, perhaps, that indicates just how little the lip service paid to art and freedom in contemporary society really signifies: how easy it is to reduce both to insignificance.

David Morse

Distance and Style

the visual rhetoric of Max Ophuls: Letter from an Unknown Woman

Always at one remove. Lisa (Joan Fontaine) confronts Stefan (Louis Jourdan) through a pane of glass . . .

Letter from an Unknown Woman is a "period" film, set as the opening title informs us in Vienna around 1900. Made in Hollywood, it thus leads us to expect sets and costumes faithful to the location and time.

While I can't judge the fidelity of the details of the dress and architecture for want of factual information about that period myself, most viewers will probably agree that the film looks reasonably faithful. However, one cannot help noticing that the sets appear quite unreal; that is, we are very conscious that they are in fact sets. A complete romantic might wish to create a feeling of total indentification on the part of the audience — a sense that we are actually watching Vienna in 1900. Ophuls instead chooses to make us aware that we are watching action occurring on movie sets which are supposed to represent Vienna in 1900.

This is not a deficiency in set design but a conscious element in Ophuls's art. We can see this best perhaps by considering the sets (made by Golitzen to the director's specifications) in the context of Ophuls's thematic concerns. Love, which runs like a main theme throughout his work, is seen in his films precisely in the context of its loss. His films are made from a positon where all possibilities of a full-blooded, real, sensual experience has passed, where total romantic union of viewer with object or of lover with lover is impossible. It is more than simply an acquiescence to Hollywood convention that is at work when he films the first truly sensual embrace between Lisa and Stefan in a frame which grows successively darker, making their forms like silhouettes, until it finally fades out — or, more accurately, transforms itself into the net shot, which is of a blank curtain.

Ophuls's frames ,then, like the sets within them, appear to the viewer not in terms of the immedate perception of the truth of the frames' world (cf. Borzage) but as consciously constructed entities, whose very construction is an essential element of the film. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is one of his most cluttered works. Every frame is replete with an extraordinary density of objects in the foreground and the background, often partially obscurng a character from view; of shadows, panes of glass, reflections. The effect is to prevent the viewer from feeling that he is watching some real world of the past, and to make him aware instead of the frames *as* constructions, as a created art.

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Another way of describing this effect is by calling it cinematic distance. The feeling that we are watching a created film prevents us from achieving a true union with the action; thus specific elements which help create that feeling also endistance us from that action. The whole sequence of scenes describing Lisa's first acquaintance with Stefan is conceived of in terms of various forms of distance. The first sight we have of her in the film is from behind a harp, her face visible through the strings. She is watching Stefan's things being moved into her building. Ophuls next shows her listening to him playing the piano by panning a shot of his window with music coming from it, to a shot of her on a swing, seen between two branches of a tree's trunk. In these shots, there are two kinds of distance working. Through her eyes, we are coming to know Stefan not through his actual physical presence but only through the presence of things connected with him. (This idea is continued in the sequence in which she sneaks into his appartment and looks around his rooms at his possessions.) Further, as viewers of the film, we are coming to see Lisa also in terms of distance — through harps, or behind tree trunks. In both cases, objects in the frame take on reality as great as, or greater than, that of the characters.

Similar elements take on a directness of expression which in certain respects reminds one of the film of Douglas Sirk. In one scene of Lisa listening to Stefan playing from outside his room, she manages to get a glimpse of his hands reflected in the partially opened window. When she sees him for the first time, she is standing behind a glass door, separated from him by the panes. Again, when she comes out of his apartment (in the scene mentioned above) she sees her mother kissing an older man on the stairs below. This sudden sight has a kind of jarring shock — almost as if this vision of her mother (herself, perhaps, in twenty years) mocks her own romanticization of Stefan. This is made clearer when her mother, explaining how even at her age she can love a man, says that "later" Lisa will come to understand these things.

But Ophuls is not Sirk, and none of these examples have the kind of devastating unlimited power imparted to similar occurences in a film like *The Tarnished Angels*. Instead, Ophuls prevents any single element from dominating the film's form by creating a marvellous continuity of character and object, background and foreground, event and action. His frames are not rigidly static, they do not separate objects from objects or setting from character. No part of the

. . . sighs for him through the wrought iron gates . . .

frame is allowed to assume a singular or fixed function or meaning. Late in the film, there is a shot of Lisa and Johann entering their house, which begins in a long shot looking down at them in the distance coming from the hallway, with various objects filling the foreground. As they and the camera move closer together, the camera pans following them further, until they are in the foreground in front of a wall whose furniture and other details are now in the background. The shot began with objects in the foreground, appearing to dominate the frame, and ends with characters in the foreground, changing place with the objects, and a new set of objects replacing the characters in the background. (There are numerous similar shots throughout the film.)

Ophuls's objects, we have said, sets, lighting, the whole world of his frames, appear false or constructed. The Vienna streets and buildings look almost like painted cardboard; the street-lamps like papier mâché, the snow like false white powder. The frames' endless details and endistancings suggest that this falseness is Ophuls's representation of the impossibility of sensual love. The narrative, as in so many of his films, poses a situation in which such a love is seen at the outset to be lost. As in *Lola Montez,* the flashback form provides another kind of distance — seeing love enclosed by a present situation which renders its recurrence impossible. In the "present" of *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* Lisa is already dead, and Stefan hopelessly dissipated. The "falseness" of the frames seems perfectly to represent a state in which all physical feeling has been drained from the world. One feels Ophuls's objects not so much as real full-blooded presences but as shadows of some former real self, as the skin or surface-appearance of something whose real essence has long since fled, leaving behnd only its unsensual shell. This is why curtains or panes of glass in all his frames create a feeling of architecture or sculpture, as if their details were carvings on some stone. Each object or character is like a little ornament or rill, but the film itself posits no central shape on which the ornaments might be carved; rather, it is made up of such ornaments. When the characters are shown in static shots, or moving through a continuity of these ornaments, they appear to have a meaning and function in the frame no different from the inanimate objects, which are themselves unsensual shadows. This is Ophuls's visual expression of the state in which love is long lost and impossible.

But by virtue of the *continuous nature* of his visual field, Ophuls indicates that his conception of impossibility and distance allow these concepts none of the rigid and terrible fixity that they can assume in Sirk. In fact, despite his continual use of endistancing devices, Ophuls might be called romantic, although his romanticism is of a very special sort. What he does is to take his created sense of falseness, his clutter of inanimate details, and, through the use of various forms of continuity, make the viewer come to accept it on a level more immediate than that of simply being aware of its unreality. Within the context of this awareness, he is able to create a feeling for, even a belief in, his sets, his characters' feelings, as "real" things. Which is to say that in the context of a love long rendered impossible by time, he is nonetheless able to make one believe in the existence of some form of love, of the presence of at least a convincing illusion of such a love within the frames; in the context of a world which is clearly constructed, he is able to make us believe that on some level, it is "real" and that we may identify with it.

This romanticism has many forms and materializations — the continuity of the visual field, the use of long single takes, the use of camera movements to follow the characters, or to move around them. Its most obvious representation in *Letter from an Unknown Woman,* and perhaps in all of Ophuls, is the sequence in the make-believe train car. Ophuls introduces the scene by cutting to a shot which has Lisa and Stefan facing each other in the train compartment, with a landscape going by in the window between them; the camera moves back from them and the landscape, revealing the landscape as "false", as a painting of the countryside which, we discover later, is mounted on a roller turned by an old man pedalling. After this initial shot, Ophuls begins to cut between a shot of Lisa and one of Stefan as they talk to one another, with different parts of the painted background visible in the window in each shot. This scene, like most in the film, goes far beyond our simple awareness of the background, and hence the entire action, as "false" or "un-physical". What is crucial is that we *know* from the outset that the background is painted rather than real, just as we "know" that Lisa is alread dead in the film's present tense. Every shot inside the train compartment attempts to go beyond this awareness to make the viewer feel that the train window background, which he will always objectively know to be false, is in some sense real. If Ophuls simply wished to present the background as a false background, he would have shot the scene in a single take, which would have been quite consistent with other scenes in the film. This would have presented the passing countryside as no more or no less than it is. Instead, he begins close to it, calling our attention to it as if he were stating initially its nature, and then shamelessly pulls back to reveal more of the compartment; then proceeding to cut between shots which show only parts of the scene through the train window. The effect is to treat the painted background not as an illusion whose reality as an illusion must be preserved by avoiding any jarring cutting, but paradoxically as a "real" background. A single take would have rendered a different impression, perhaps causing the viewer to think that Ophuls was aiming to expose the falseness of romanticism. The cutting, on the other hand, gives the impression that he does not see that falseness at all. The scene is cut just as the scene in a real train compartment would be, with no fear for the "fragility" of an illusion which might be disrupted if the position in the frame were altered. This is a far stronger or more romantic position, a building from sets which are consciously sets, towards a feeling not for the falseness but for the imaginative construction which they represent as a primary feeling, whether you choose to call it reality or illusion, of the film. The sense of Ophuls's images as visibly constructed entities has the effect of denying a certain primary physicality (our awareness of the construction) in the interests of creating an illusion within that very imaginative illusion.

During the train ride sequence, Stefan emerges from the train to request the backdrop for another country. We follow him outside the train, see the woman he pays for another trip, see her calling "Switzerland" to the man who is running it, and see the man lowering the drop for Switzerland and begin to pedal. Throughout all this, the backdrops are visible; we see Switzerland being lowered and see it start to move as the pedalling begins. This would seem to deny the illusion which the cutting within the department built up. In fact, rather than denying it, it expands it. It is important to remember that while inside the compartment we never lost our awareness that the background was in fact a painted drop. Ophuls's showing of all the mechanics by which that background was made to go by the train window — and following this by showing it actually going by again — is a metaphor for a process which occurs on a deeper level throughout his films. He shows us his sets as sets, his objects as mere props, and simultaneously shows us a process whereby he creates a feeling that these things are "real". We are always aware of seeing this illusion, this

feeling of the reality of the construction, in the process of being created. In the train sequence, Ophuls shows us both the illusion and the manner in which it is created, in a single scene; by seeing its creation, we come to believe in the reality of the illusion, although never believing that the drawings of the landscapes are real things. Ophuls knows we could never accept drawings as a physical, three dimensional world; rather than trying to falsely lull us into such a belief, he creates a situation in which their reality as a set is clearly visible; seeing that reality, we can accept the conscious construction for what it is.

The scene that follows is remarkably similar. Lisa and Stefan are dancing on an empty floor, the only couple left, to music played by a small band. The initial effect created is that their relationship, their love, carries through beyond the time when other couples have gone, and that the music will provide for itself, will continue from its hidden surce to 'accompany" the dancing, subjugating itself to the illusion of their love. But Ophuls immediately shows us the musicians, talking among themselves about being sick of staying so late, and declaring their intention of going home after the present number, which they do. The effect is not to mock or reduce to pathos Lisa and Stefan's dancing, but to show the means by which it was made possible. We are not lulled into accepting any factual false illusion ("the music will subjugate itself to their love"), but rather into accepting the feeling that the beauty comes from the conscious construction of the situation. Ophuls is not a romantic who believes that romanticism can triumph over everything, but rather one who seeks to find the beauty of an illusion within the realistic context which he knows encloses everything. Lisa is already dead, so any love she can have is already doomed. Lola Montez is in the circus, and her entire life is seen in the context of her being a sidehow oddity; just as the fat lady is fat, so Lola Montez had lovers. The sets are no more than sets; any illusion, any feeling, must occur in this context.

He builds up to such feelings by many methods. The continuity of the visual field, already mentioned, within the lateral and perspectival dimension of the frame prevents us from feeling that there are any fixed geometrical tensions or other visual dynamic elements at work. The profusion of objects is nothing more than a profusion of objects, with equal force and recurrence everywhere in the images. This creates a sense of interconnection, a feeling that the positions and angles can be altered without the meaning being effected, as in the shot of Lisa and Johann entering which was described earlier. Consequently, while every object works towards representing the loss of sensual feeling, no single object embodies the loss precisely: the objects never refer back to, dominate, or inform on the meanings of one another. Hence the continuity leads the viewer into accepting it as a kind of reality, much as he accepts the continuity of a false background which continues its motion despite the cutting in the train sequence.

It is well known that this continuity applies best to Ophuls's use of camera movements, particularly of his long takes. On numerous occasions, the camera follows the people as they walk and talk to one another, stops with them and changes direction as they do. Following them through a changing background of objects further belies the notion that Ophuls's objects deny reality to the characters' feelings. In such camera movements, the continuity of the movement matches the continuity of feeling which the single take allows to build up. The long single take in Ophuls's most direct expression of the building up of a romantic feeling despite whatever larger context the film seems to establish. True to the classical theories, the longer the take, the stronger the illusion grows, the more intoxicating the camera movements become; (whereas the cuts seem to disrupt such continuity, placing the feelings in another context).

Ophuls's camera does not merely follow the characters; he pans from one part of a setting to another, moves around objects, moves around characters. As Lisa finishes her letter, the camera moves round a lamp without cutting, sustaining the devastating feeling of her words at the same time that its movement seems to impose some order on the emotions of the scene which adds to or complements those words rather than disrupting them. In short, once one accepts his use of false sets and the "unphysicality" of his frames, a large part of Ophuls's style can be seen to be directed at the sustenance of feeling, the maintenance of an emotional continuity of illusion.

Hand in hand with this ability to maintain the illusion (which we must distinguish very carefully) is an opposing desire to *place* that illusion in a more formal context. A good deal of this is done through the cutting. If single takes in Ophuls are meant to maintain illusion, the cutting disrupts it, breaking the dream, and imposing a more structured order on the action. His cutting is not fixed in a dialectical or structural way like Eisenstein's, but rather a recognition that life in fact has form and structure, that relationships between people are not all love but have their mechanics too; that the dance cannot go on for ever, for eventually the musicians will go home. The use of cutting also works to some extent against the spatial continuity of the frame (itself an aspect of romanticism), by breaking the geography of the scene up into fixed angles and points of view. When Ophuls can cut between profiles of two people showing some of the same background in each shot, as in the train car with the false backdrop, the illusion is maintained by the continuity of the background; when he has to cut between head-on shots which have the camera pointing in opposite directions in scenes in which two people are facing one another, and thus showing little or no common background, the illusion is broken. It is no accident that such cutting is used at moments in the narrative for which it is well suited — Lisa's mother telling of her coming marriage, or Stefan's departure for Milan on the train. As the romance of Lisa's love appears to break apart, Ophuls uses such fragmented cutting, representing the disruption of that continuity.

Another use of cutting, particularly of cutting in conjunction with certain unusual camera angles, is connected with Ophuls's sense of fate. So far I have not asked the question why love is not possible. I have not asked it because in Ophuls it is largely irrelevant. The

. . . bids her son farewell from behind her veil.

reason given for Lisa's not seeing Stefan again — she says "I wanted to be one woman you had known who asked you for nothing" — is not exactly a convincing pretext for such devastation. To a certain extent, one must accept the impossibility of love as given; like the unreality of the sets, Ophuls does not seek to explain it but to explore its implications. But there are references, here and in other of his films, to some cruel kind of fate which has a hand in the denial. There are several in the script: early in the film, Lisa says (in her letter) "What happened to us had its own reason beyond our poor understanding"; and later, describing her feelings about her apparently chance meeting with Stefan at the opera, "I know now nothing happens by chance. Every moment is measured, every step is counted." In fact the entire form of the film as a flashback, is manifestly fatalistic. The sense of an arbitrary order beyond the characters' powers of comprehension is most strongly expressed in the cutting and in certain camera angles.

The most obvious and striking sequence relevant here is the amazing repetition of the balcony shot when Lisa and Stefan enter his house for the first time. Earlier, Lisa had seen Stefan entering with a girl and laughing flirtatiously with her from a position on a landing several floors up; the camera panned as her eyes followed them up the stairs. Lisa had been waiting to offer herself to him, having run away from her parents who wanted to take her to Linz; seeing him with a girl, she concludes there is nothing there for her and dutifully decides to go with her parents after all. Later, she returns to Vienna, begins seeing him again and is very happy; once he takes her home for the first time and Ophuls films this from exactly the same position on the balcony, panning following them just as he did earlier with the other couple. The difference is that the first shot was a point-of-view shot from no one's position, since the landing is empty. It has a kind of fatalism, a sense of foreboding, that is borne out well by the story; for after they enter and sleep together, Lisa becomes pregnant and loses all contact with Stefan. On several occasions during the film, Ophuls takes the camera to a place which would make a fine point-of-view shot, except that there is no one there watching the action. For instance, Lisa and Stefan first come to a restaurant seen by the camera inside the restaurant looking through a window; the camera pans with them as they walk past the windows and in the door, remaining inside the restaurant all the time.

Letter from an Unknown Woman is full of many connecting themes, undercurrents, unstated implications, some of which I have attempted to elucidate. It is, finally, a triumph of style as style, of consciously created style as a metaphor for feelings that are as "romantic" as those aimed at by less self-aware practitioners of the genre. The paradox is that Ophuls's distancing devices, his cool awareness of the "ideology" of the romantic convention should allow this (it is only his second American film.). The achievement defines Ophuls as an artist: the sense of fate, of lost love, exists not as some literary content, but in the very play of the film's style — i.e., literally, as its mise-en-scene. The desolation throughout, becoming stronger at certain moments, is its own beauty. A final instance: the barrenness of the restaurant where Stefan had first taken Lisa — earlier, it was full of people, now as she looks at him once again after many years it is almost empty — is like a metaphor for the final passage of feeling and life from the world. In this sense it is very close to the end of the Bavarian episode of *Lola Montez,* with the desolate palace and distant sounds of revolution. One might say that the film's primary state, what it presents as the real present, is represented by the very beginning and closing scenes, in which Stefan prepares to duel Johann, who apparently thinks Lisa is still with him. The lighting is dark and sparse, and conversations are unstressed, muted, without feeling. In Ophuls it is only when surrounded by such a 'frame' that any sense of love occurs.

Fred Camper

"... I want to confess.. I killed a man" *Phillips Holmes in* Broken Lullaby.

muted strings: Ernst Lubitsch's Broken Lullaby

Today both the intrinsic quality and the historical importance of Lubitsch's achievement are almost universally recognized. But there is no critical consensus as to specific works. A case in point is *Broken Lullaby* (or *The Man I Kliled*, 1932), which tends to be highly regarded by more content-conscious critics, but which has been described by Andrew Sarris as "Lubitsch's least inspired and most calculated effort" in the thirties, "all surface effect, all ritualistic piety toward a 'noble' subject."

According to Sarris, Lubitsch was a "comic talent" who went astray when he tried his hand at serious, "humorless" material.[1] I believe, on the contrary, that *Broken Lullaby* is a remarkable film in itself; that it is not as foreign to the Lubitsch corpus as is widely believed, and has many features in common with the comiedies;[2] finally, that it is certainly far from being a "humorless' film.

The opening sequences of *Broken Lullaby* are truly stunning and endowed in Paris on November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of Armstice Day. Soldiers march up the Champs-Elysées toward the Arc of Triumph to the sound of cheering crowds and a military band. Shots of the pageant are framed by the leg and stump of a one-legged veteran. From the strident crowds the camera suddenly tracks to a sign which reads "Silence — Hospital"; Lubitsch then cuts to a shot of the inside of the hospital, and a wounded soldier screams that he cannot stand the din any longer. The second part of the prologue takes place inside a church where a Te Deum is being sung to commemorate the recent victory. The camera tracks up the nave along glistening sabres jutting out of the pews. While a text is read out about "Peace" the camera lingers on the bulky holster of a revolver; as soon as the reading is over the whole congregation is seen to stand up and move out in brisk, efficient way; they are all soldiers and put their helmets back on their heads before they leave the church. The church is now empty except for the presence of a dove-like thing on the back of one of the pews, it is impossible to make out what is is until the camera moves closer and shows this "thing" to be a man's hands clasped in desperate prayer, the man himself (Philipps Holmes) is then seen kneeling or rather sunk behnd the bench. A tortured look on his face, he comes up to a priest wandering in the back of the church. "I want to confess, I killed a man," Holmes says. The priest looks horrified, takes Holmes to a confessional. Holmes explains: "It was during the war. He was a German soldier . . ." The priest's face relaxes, he replies in almost cheerful manner: "Then you did only your duty! Don't think of it any more . . ."

Thus a number of statements are being made in a predominantly visual way. Firstly, for the Parisian crowd, the horrors of the war are forgotten, drowned out in a frantic celebration, but the spectator is reminded of these horrors all the more forcefully as they are enhanced by the effect of anti-thesis (the one-legged veteran, the hospital). Secondly, the celebration of "Peace" is really a celebration of war, for it takes the form of essentially military ceremonial: a pageant, a churchful of heavily armed, helmeted soldiers (the visuals consistently contradicting the soundrack with its mentions of "Peace"). Thirdly, Lubitsch stresses the collusion between the powers that be of Church and Army, the Church is seen as giving over both its buildings and personnel to the miltary celebration, even religious "values" (to do one's duty, not to kill) are subservient to war-mongering nationalism. As for Phillips Holmes, he is shown as completely isolated from his fellow-Frenchmen, but tragically similar to "the man he killed". In a flashback, he remembers the war. He is seen in the trenches, killing with his bayonet a young German soldier who stares at him. The German was writing a letter in which he asks why he should kill Frenchmen, since he spent two years in Paris and loved French people. The letter is completed and will be forwarded by Holmes; the sequence closes with a shot of a book on Beethoven (belonging to the dead German) to a Beethovian crescendo. Holmes in his alienation finds no comfort in the sophistic solace of the Church. The priest is well-nigh farcical not only in his early refusal to recognize Holmes' moral problem, but also later on, when he approves of Holmes' plan to go to Germany and ask forgiveness of the dead German's mother. It is clear that the priest, havng made up his mind that he is dealing with a fanatic, a madman, is above all trying to get rid of him when he encourages him to go, showing him a picture of a *Pietà* in the back of the church and explaining: "She forgave, so *his* mother will forgive you, too." Therefore the overture is informed by Lubitsch's use of black humour which emphasizes the gulf between Holmes's idealism and military/religious realism, and also achieves the effect of having the spectator believe in Holmes's far-fetched predicament. Both the unrelenting tempo and the extreme quality of the individual segments establish the film's own credibility and set it firmly in melodrama.

Afterwards, the tempo of the film is allowed to relax, it meanders, its atmosphere both sentimental and humorous, now and again regaining the dramatic quality of the overture, but never to the same paroxysmal degree. Beside the evident aspect of structure, one of the reasons for this change is that we have moved to Germany, the country of the vanquished, where people are not drunk on victory, but tend to remember and tentatively learn how to live again. The basic plot has Phillips Holmes (Paul Renard) introduce himself to the German's parents and fiancée (the Hölderlins and Elsa), find it impossible to tell them the true motive of his visit and tell them instead that he used to be a friend of Walter when they were both musical students in Paris, before the war. Gradually Paul comes to occupy the place left vacant by the dead son in the Hölderlin home and in the fiancée's heart. He tells her the truth, but she decides that he must stay for the sake of Walter's parents. Finally she admits to loving him without any such reservations.

It is perhaps not necessary to linger on the melodramatic implications of the plot. Basic to the structure of many melodramas is the device whereby one character replaces another person whom he has previously harmed. This device is present here (Paul Renard replacing, actually becoming "the man he killed" for Walter's fiancée and parents) as in, say, Douglas Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession* (Rock Hudson replacing, becoming Dr. Phillips, for whose death he had been responsible). This device can be seen as another example of the literalness of the melodramatic spirit:[3] redemption has to be total and literal, a "buying back". In *Magnificent Obsession,* the shift of characters is made possible by the fact that both men are doctors: (at any rate, Rock Hudson had been a medical student); in *Broken Lullaby,* by the fact that they are both musicians. In Lubitsch's film, Walter and Paul are mirror images of each other, since what they have in common (a love of music) can be broken up into German music (the book on Beethoven, Schumann's *Träumerei*) and French training (Walter's studies in Paris). In other words, the basic melodramatic pattern of reversibility corresponds, on the human level, to the pacifist, intenrationalist message of the film. The film's progression consists in making explicit the implicit assimilation of Walter and Paul. The assimilation is already hinted at in the flashback of the trenches; it becomes complete when Nancy Carroll (Elsa) tells Paul that if he leaves the Hölderlins, it will be like "killing Walter a second time".

Lubitsch displays dazzling virtuosity in controlling the emotions of the audience, having them run all the gamut from pathos to farce, sometimes through very swift changes. One recurrent pattern is from conventional emotion to original comic touch and then back to heightened emotion. Thus, the opening scene of the German part of the film takes place in the graveyard where Mrs. Hölderlin meets another woman who is also visiting her son's grave. Mrs. Hölderlin mentions that her neighbour's son would often come and eat her cakes. Her friend wonders at this, she did so much baking herself. "What is your recipe"? she asks. "So much butter . . . two cups of sugar." "Oh, *two* cups of sugar! I'll know better next time . . ." and she bursts into tears. A similar incident occurs later at the Hölderlin family table. After a gloomy beginning, Lionel Barrymore (Dr. Hölderlin) tries to cheer up, states that beer still tastes good, etc. Everybody joins in, until finall somebody exclaims: "You'd hardly know there had been a war!" Back to brooding silence and sadness. In both these instances, humour is not used to relieve the dramatic tension, but on the contrary to heighten it unexpectedly. In this way, a kind of *emotional suspense* is gradually built up. Elsewhere the comic and the pathetic are juxtaposed rather than dialectically united. Members of the older generation, including Schultz (Lucien Littlefield), Elsa's ridiculous would-be lover, are gathered together at the Gasthof, downing beers. A young man is seated by himself at a nearby table. Schultz's jealousy masquerades as patriotism, he gives vent to his disgust at the Hölderlins for keeping a Frenchman as their guest. He hints that Paul may well be a spy ,and, to make his point, solemnly asks: "He keeps his violin-case locked, I tell you, what is in his violin-case?" The young man then dryly remarks: "Maybe a violin." Lionel Barymore comes in and orders a round of beer. Schultz ostentatiously refuses his beer, others follow suit. Barrymore then orders "one beer" in a loud voice (a further comic touch), and gives a dignified speech on the responsibilities of the older generation, who remained safely at home while they sent off young boys to be butchered on the front. The young man then stands up to shake Lionel Barrymore's hand; he has lost a leg in the war and walks on crutches. Lionel Barrymore steps out of the restaurant, looks at the town gate through which soldiers used to leave to the cheers of the crowds; their steps are heard and fade on the soundtrack. By the arch of the gate is a memorial plaque to the war dead. This sequence therefore echoes the opening of the film in Paris: cheering crowds in France, the memory of cheering crowds in Germany; a one-legged German in the café; the Arch of Triumph and the village Tor.

There are further instances when comic touches do not add to the emotional impact. Noteworthy is the gag of

Resolution through music ... Paul plays Walter's violin.

the dress ("confidentially, made in France") whose price goes up as the salesman watches the progress of the romance between Phillips Holmes and Nancy Carroll. To a similar vein (the gently satiric depiction of small-town Germany) belongs the symphony of shop doorbells which punctuates the lovers' walk through town as all shopkeepers and customers step out of their shops to watch. Finally, there is the scene (which follows the one previously described of the restaurant) in which Schultz decides to come up to Paul and irritate him by telling him in lusty undertones (which in fact have the ring of sincerity) about pretty girls in gay Paris. But the other customers, Schultz's friends, are incensed that he should even consider even consider addressing the Frenchman. They call him back by shouting a stentorian and reproachful "Schultz!" which in retrospect is made even funnier by its systematic use in *To Be or Not To Be* (Sig Ruman blaming his orderly, "Schultz", for all his own mistakes, up to and including his own suicide).

The use of doors in Lubitsch comedies has often been remarked and commented upon. In *Trouble in Paradise* in particular (doubtlessly one of Lubitsch's major and most perfect films), doors play a part as important as many of the characters and increase our understanding of the situation, whilst at the same time they contribute to the stylistic cohesion of the film (through ambiguity and understatement) and to the pervasive humour. This use of doors is also to be found in *Broken Lullaby,* both as a humoristic device (the symphony of doorbells) and as a dramatic device, as a pause and punctuation. Always kept closed is the door to Walter's room, a kind of sanctuary where time stands still (this is paradoxically underlined by Dr. Hölderlin's winding up of the clock in this room: time has stopped in an everlasting present, which makes it possible for Dr. Hölderlin to hold on to the illusion that Walter may come back any minute. But then Dr. Hölderlin is vindicated by the end of the film, when it becomes clear that Walter has come back — in Paul's guise — after all). After the scene of Paul's "confession" to Elsa, Paul slams the door shut and leaves Elsa alone in the sanctuary: the brutal shutting of the door, like the closing of a coffin lid, is Phillips Holmes's last attempt at rejecting the role of Walter, at challenging the melodramatic logic which forces him to *be* Walter since he killed Walter. Later, when Elsa has told Mrs. Hölderlin that Paul would always stay with them, she closes the door to talk to Paul. Now the meaning is reversed, since Paul has in a sense become a prisoner, but also because at the same time he is behind the same door as Elsa — an intimation of the happy ending which is to follow.

This ending is an appropriate coda, which, like the overture, stands out from the rest of the film — not that it is "better", but because its rhetorical function is underlined rather than underrated. Phillips Holmes plays the violin (Schumann's *Träumerei,* a lullaby); he uses Walter's violin, not his own. There is a close shot of Nancy Carroll's face coming nearer to Holmes's; she smiles to him. He smiles back. She goes to the piano, unlocks it and starts accompanying him on the piano. The editing emphasizes the newly reborn unity of the family cell, shots of the Hölderlin parents (on the sofa, ecstatically listening to the music and smiling at their "children" 's happiness) alternate with shots of the musicians. This reconstitution of the family cell solves an earlier (implicit) conflict between the claims of different generations. Dr. Hölderlin had stated in the restaurant that he wanted to take part of the younger generation, whereas Elsa had told Paul that he must stay because "it's them, the parents, we have to think of". At the end, Paul (Walter reincarnate) stays not just for "them", but also for "her" and therefore for himself — for the sake of both the old generation and the new. A basic structure which is highly conventional (and hardly characteristic of Lubitsch) is translated into Lubitschian terms by the peculiar form it is given. That this form should be musical is not unexpected; it is fitting both because of the inherent musical quality of melo-drama and because music provides, as I said earlier, a bond between Walter and Paul (similarly, in *Magnificent Obsession* Bob Merrick and Helen Phillips are finally reunited through his accomplishment as a surgeon). But in the context of Lubitsch's *oeuvre*, the scene is also endowed with unmistakeable sexual innuendo. The key here, so to speak, is the fact that the piano was locked, therefore functions as an emblem of Elsa's repressed sexuality (similarly, Paul's violin-case was locked, and he uses Walter's): the "Broken Lullaby" is thus resumed in more than one sense. In other Lubitsch films (e.g. *The Smiling Lieutenant*), the reference to a piano and violin duet is clearly sexual; seen from this point of view, *Broken Lullaby* reveals itself not just a powerful pacifist tract, but also a film whose style and theme (the smooth resolution of sexual inhibitions) are closely related to Lubitsch's *oeuvre* as a whole. It will also be noted that *Broken Lullaby* appears to belong firmly in an American tradition illustrated by Leo McCarey in particular (see *Ruggles of Red Gap,* also with Zasu Pitts and Lucien Littlefield, *Make Way for Tomorrow, The Awful Truth* or *My Favorite Wife*). This may be partly due to the very American quality of the interpreters (notably Lionel Barrymore and Zasu Pitts, who plays the Hölderlins' maid), but also certainly to Lubitsch's genius as an entertainer.[4] As such he was able to turn a work of apparently basically European origins (a Maurice Rostand play) and preoccupations into a thoroughly *American* film — that is to say characterized by a technical and stylistic smoothness (here mention must be made of Victor Milner's photography) and also by qualities of rhetorical symbolism not as readily found in European treatments of the subject (cf. Renoir's *Grand Illusion*). Finally, it should be pointed out that if *Broken Lullaby* is far from being "humorless", Lubitsch comedies are equally far from being devoid of emotion: witness Kay Francis's character in *Trouble in Paradise*, the Shylock tirade in *To Be or Not to Be,* or the elegiac mood of *Heaven Can Wait.*

Jean-Loup Bourget

Notes

1 Andrew Sarris: "Lubitsch in the Thirties" — Part One, *Film Comment* vol. 7, no. 4 (New York, Winter 1971–72).

2 It should be borne in mind that the script of *Broken Lullaby* was written by Ernest Vaida and Samson Raphaelson, also responsible (either together or separately) for the scripts of *The Smiling Lieutenant, Trouble in Paradise, The Merry Widow, Angel . . .*

3 See my review of Borzage's *Seventh Heaven* in *Monogram* no. 4 (1972)

4 Cf. Jean Domarchi: "L'homme de partout", *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 198 (Paris, February 1968).

Interview Ruy Guerra

Thomas Elsaesser

Fortunately there is no need to introduce Ruy Guerra. Even though his first film, Os Cafajestes *has never been publicly shown in this country, and though* Sweet Hunters *met almost everywhere an uncomprehending because unprepared audience,* Os Fuzis *was immediately recognized to be a landmark and turning point. It also succeeded in achieving the seemingly impossible: to present a fiction that is unambiguously political in its impact, articulated by means of a linear narrative that loses none of its dialectical logic for being cast in the mould of strict documentation.*

Using behavioural realism against itself, so to speak, in order to demonstrate the inescapably social nature and class character of apparently spontaneous behaviour or of an emotional gesture, Guerra has been able to work within the mainstream tradition of the fiction film, while radically subverting the ideological context of that tradition. His films do not stop at reinstating the political dimension which Western narrative art over the past two centuries had carefully eliminated from its psychological and interpersonal picture of human existence, but — conscious no doubt of his responsibility towards the Latin-American civilization which he made his second home — he attempts to create, notably in The Gods and the Dead, *the necessary climate of action and imagination where magical and mythological forces can assume the role of shaping values and structuring moral responses, thereby indicating determinants which any political analysis ignores at its peril. To us, the work of Ruy Guerra is exemplary because he stands in the front-line of directors capable of making the narrative cinema yield a complex and analytical filmic discourse.*

"OS CAFAJESTES',

Your first film was called Os Cafajestes. *What exactly does the title mean?*

The word is difficult to translate. A "cafajeste" is somebody who flouts accepted moral values, who attacks a given morality by his anti-social or criminal behaviour. "Cafajestada" refers to a mean and nasty trick.

Can you say a little more about the social background of the "cafajestes" in your film, because it seems that the actual dramatic conflict hinges very much on social and class differences.

That's quite correct. The plot is really about an attempt at blackmail which doesn't come off. One of the guys, played by Jece Valadao, is a typical "cafajeste", he belongs to the urban proletariat, and he goes round in a borrowed American car, so that he can at least pretend he is something better. He needs the car as a status symbol for his trade as a blackmailer. The "cafajestes" at a certain time were almost a group with their own codes of behaviour, dress, places they hung out in Rio. The interesting thing is that from a sociological point of view, their origins were very heterogenous, there were young louts and layabouts who didn't have regular jobs, there were professional criminals, pimps, but also millionaires, play-boys, sons of the upper bourgeoisie. A lot of people who had somehow not managed to enter the circles of the old landed aristocracy. Oddly enough their aggressiveness and violence was almost always directed against women — either prostitutes, or women from the haute bourgeoisie. Most of these guys were very good-looking and had chances with women anyway, but they often picked them up just for the fun of humiliating them in front of the gang. A "cafajeste" was something of a specialist in knowing the emotional and sexual hang-ups of women from a certain social class and he was able to exploit them. The "cafajeste" in my film is determined to make the blackmail work because he wants to buy the car, so that he can mix with polite society and wouldn't have to hang round cafes any more. For him the car is a way of climbing socially.

What is the relation between him and his friend who takes the photographs?

The friend comes from a different social milieu, the bourgeoisie, he is weak and he obviously admires the casual ruthlessness of the other man and goes along with him. One thing one must bear in mind is the role of the beach in these circles. The beach democratizes enormously. People go to the beach in the morning and stay there until nightfall. It isn't segregated, it's open and accessible to everyone, and a lot of young men, many from the interior of the country, who come to the city to find work end up on the beach, because if they are good-looking they can make a living as

professional male prostitutes and hustlers. Again, that gives them a certain social mobility, they get invited to fashionable parties.

What about the two girls?

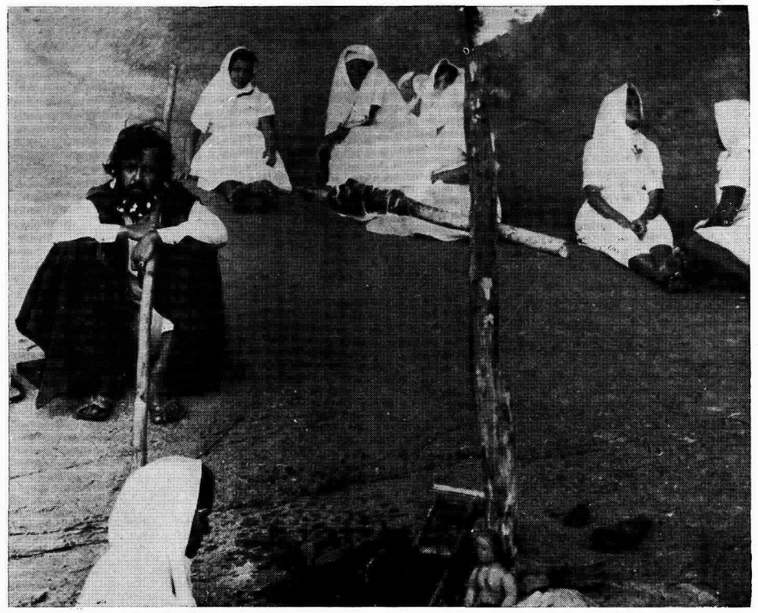
They, too, come from different classes. One of them, played by Normal Benguel, is pretty well the exact counterpart of the "cafajeste", with only one difference that she has made it, or so the guy thinks when he tries to blackmail her, because she is the mistress of a rich bourgeois, her "uncle". And the other girl is the cousin of the guy who takes the photos, she is a well looked-after, sheltered girl, with a taste for adventure. The men are the aggressors, as it were, they take the initiative, but in the long run they are shown up by the women who are both morally and emotionally stronger. Even when the women are the victims, they unmask the men in the process of being victimized, and this often defines the psychological relation between the sexes.

The film begins with the humiliation of a prostitute by the "cafajeste" who takes her home in his car and then throws her out at 2 am, so that she gets picked up by the police. Again, the central scene in the film is the humiliation of the girl when the "cafajeste" takes to the beach, and after seducing her, he takes away her clothes, so that they photograph her in the nude and use the pictures for blackmail. In what sense does she feel degraded by this?

She is being humiliated, but not because she's being photographed in the nude. What is humiliating to her is that despite the mutual degradation, she really did feel a certain deep affection for the guy, perhaps because she recognizes how alike they both are. She gives herself to him quite spontaneously, full well knowing what kind of person he is. On the other hand, she is strong enough as a woman — and beautiful enough — not to feel disgraced by being seen naked.

What comes across very strongly in Os Cafajestes *is the sense that the characters are imprisoned in their social situation as well as in their very limited awareness of themselves. Their only course of action seems to be to torment and exploit each other emotionally, in a rather savage manner, yet this nonetheless makes up their day-to-day reality and determines their outlook and their reactions.*

Yes, and it is also the way they express whatever tenderness and affection they feel. Personally, I don't see a rigid division between good and evil in emotions and actions. The moral value of the characters depends very much on their motivation at a particular moment, the actual circumstances. In a sense, all the characters in *Os Cafajestes* are "degraded", but that is simply their primary condition, as it were, and it is only within this condition that good and evil take on any moral significance. Similarly, the character of the "Gaucho" in *Os Fuzis* is morally speaking a bastard, he cheats the unemployed peasants of their money, he enjoys humilating the father who is forced to sell his daughter, but as the



Resignation and hope . . . superstition portrayed in Os Fuzis

film progresses, other sides of him also become apparent, he comes to realize how much closer his own life is bound up socially — not morally, because he still despises them — with the villagers rather than with his former buddies, the soldiers. What interests me is how feelings of friendship, of love even, are born out of what in terms of ordinary values are morally depraved relationships. I also very much believe in a class-morality. But at the same time, I'm convinced that class-morality doesn't wholly define the moral stance of an individual. True, people are more defined by their class-morality than by their individual morality. For example, when he is a lorry-driver and making a living, the "Gaucho's" behaviour is very much that of his profession, but as circumstances make him slide down the social scale, a different moral behaviour appears. This, obviously, cuts both ways. One has to guard against a certain moral populism. One can't say that the rich are automatically evil and the poor are good, what one can say, however, is that the rich, given their position, have a greater opportunity and perhaps even tendency to do evil than those who are poor, and this is a fact of class, and not one of morality. But here we touch a theme which stands behind all this, and that is the question of power-relations, and how they develop unconsciously.

"OS FUZIS" (1963)

Is Os Fuzis *based on a historical incident, or how is one to take the subtitle "Nordeste, 1963"?*

The film was made in 1963, and that's what it primarily refers to. The history of the holy man and the bull lies back quite some time, it happened in 1924, and the bull was eventually killed not by the peasants, but by the army. Nonetheless, the situation does correspond fairly accurately to a certain streak of mysticism and superstition still very characteristic of the Nordeste today. And the holy man who accompanies the bull was a man who had a definite political influence in the region, a kind of rival to the local politicians, because he promised a miracle, namely that rain would come and end the drought. These droughts, of course, are notorious in the area, and I wanted very much to convey the idea that the circumstances and conditions depicted didn't refer to some historical situation, but belonged very much to the present.

The structure of Os Fuzis *is very carefully worked out. Did the idea of a parallel action develop during the actual shooting?*

No, this is the way I planned it from the start. In *Os Fuzis* I was particularly conscious of the importance of the narrative structure, I wanted to find a form where I could integrate material which has an almost documentary character.

The paralleled action, with its two radically different dramatic rhythms does in fact, when taken together, suggest a political consciousness arrived at dialectically by the implicit rapport between waiting for the miracle that never happens and waiting for the lorries that take away the stockpiled grain and thus the peasants' hope of escaping starvation.

Obviously I thought a lot about this and I tried to convey it mainly through the film's structure. I attach a great importance to the structure of a film, and I work very hard on it, since it carries an essential part of the film's signicance. I improvise a good deal on the set, depending on the decor, the material circumstances, the actors, and therefore I have to have a structure which is very solid and well worked out. Even though after the shooting I invariably consider

the whole material anew in the cutting room.

Together with Rosi's Salvatore Guiliano, Os Fuzis *is often mentioned as the model of a "political" film, in the sense of a "politicised intelligence". It is often said that a narrative film cannot embody a critical awareness, and yet* Os Fuzis *seems to possess an undoubtedly dialectical movement and is nonetheless quite linear in its structure.*

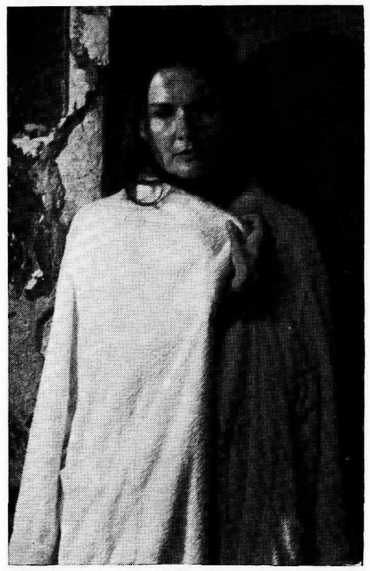
First of all, I'm always very flattered when people compare me with Rosi, because I think he is an absolutely first-rate director, though I haven't seen that many of his films. Secondly, I think the argument about the impossibility of the narrative form is often wrongly put. For example, when *Os Fuzis* was first shown in 1963 people thought it a very difficult film, they thought the narrative was terribly devious, complex and needlessly obscure. That's why it got into the cinemas only three or four years later. And yet the film today seems very clear, not to say simple. But at the time even I thought it was complex and complicated — the film really did cause me a lot of headaches. And because it was thought so obscure, I had a pretty serious disagreement with the producer. He wanted to cut out the buli altogether, and just leave the story of the "Gaucho" and the soldiers, make a straight action movie out of it, rather like a Western. It might have looked quite beautiful, but it didn't make sense to me anymore, there wouldn't have been any justification for making it, because the story of the soldiers and the village only takes on a significance in the context of the bull and vice versa. And for that reason the structure had to be linear and the form had to be narrative.

One often confuses in a film that which takes place in the character and that which the audience notices. It is not possible or even desirable that a character should have an awareness of a given situation which goes beyond what is psychologically or intellectually plausible. Or inversely, even if the character has, let's say, a fairly advanced understanding of the situation, this doesn't mean that the spectator can always follow. The action of the character gives rise to something, admittedly, but in the spectator maybe it evokes quite a different reaction. And that's, for example, what happened with most of the Italian neo-realist films, which show a really quite serious intellectual confusion. At the end of the film, there would always be a character who asserted that society was bound to change, whereas the spectator may not believe this at all, or at any rate have his doubts whether the guy in the film really knows what he is talking about. I always ask myself what is the rapport between the spectator and the character on the screen. I don't like characters who go beyond their own possibilities. If they do, they become false, and the emotional current between spectator and character is broken. In the case of *Os Fuzis* I did try to keep a certain political vision in mind, but its manifestations are necessarily complex and occasionally oblique.

In view of the ideological elements which make up a person's consciousness or psychology, what is your conception of "character" in a film?

I think there is a definite need to overcome a purely psychological cinema. I don't mean that there shouldn't be any account taken of what one might call the behavioural psychology of the characters. On the contrary, there is an emotion based on the psychological rapport between spectator and the characters, and this rapport must be respected. The character must exist, he must have a mind, a sensibility, reflexes which transmit a whole range of emotions, and those emotions one has to take account of.

"A film about dissatisfaction" . . . Sweet Hunters.

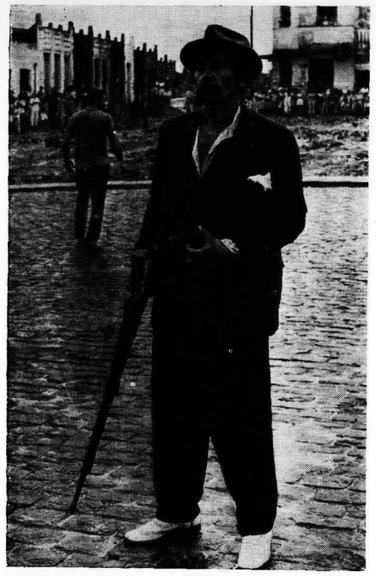


Ambiguous impulses . . . Sweet Hunters

What has to be questioned is the psychological interpretation of human structures and of society as a whole, which is too narrow and special an angle even when it comes to explaining certain specific and intimate human relationships. I try nonetheless to make my characters exist within a framework of psychological responses, that is, they can be accounted for psychologically in some measure, even if they cannot be interpreted and analysed fully within this framework. What is dangerous is to reduce all action to the level of individual psychology. In *Os Fuzis* the characters are psychologically complex, and yet it isn't a psychological film.

How do you see the signicance of the "Gaucho" in political terms, especially his act of revolt at the end?

It seems to me that the "Gaucho" in *Os Fuzis* is in the last analysis an example of false leadership. First of all, he doesn't belong to the masses, except under the conjunction of external circumstances, because from the moment he no longer has any money he has also run out of credit, and once he has lost credit he can't buy his drinks anymore, and it is at this point that he joins the masses, takes the side of the villagers, out of a sense of personal humiliation. But he isn't really someone who belongs to the people. Secondly, his revolt starts from a purely emotional gesture, he doesn't care whether the others might follow him or not, to be a real leader he would have to assume some kind of responsibility, and not just precede the villagers by a tiny step. That's why his gesture is a suicidal one, it's an act purely on the level of a moral conscience, so to speak, and not of revolutionary consciousness, and that's why he gets himself killed. At the time I was reproached for having given the film such a "negative" ending. People wanted to see the peasants follow the "Gaucho", take up arms, over-



The Gods and the Dead

turn the lorries, burn them, have a big shoot-out and so on. And I said, sure I'd like to see that too, but it has got to happen in reality, not in my film. Because in the film it isn't possible, it's false, given what the people are and the situation. That's how you get false revolutionary cinema, where things are shown on the screen which aren't possible or or not yet possible in real life. In a sense, too, such films are in danger of giving a false leadership.

On the face of it, Sweet Hunters *is a film very much concerned with "psychological" themes, the family, the more and more strained relationships between a bourgeois couple, their grown-up daughter on an isolated island. And yet, you have said that it isn't a psychological film. How do you see it?*

It isn't psychological for me in the sense that the characters do not communicate with each other, they don't try to comprehend each other on the purely psychological level. They all sense that what motivates them to act in the way they do lies deeper, they obscurely sense an unconscious charge that determines their attitudes and emotions. The woman, for example, without entirely being aware of it, follows a course, in her mind as well as in her actions, which converges and fuses with a whole network of cultural patterns whose existence within herself she had hardly suspected. She does things, she ritualizes her gestures without being aware of it, but in the last instance it's they that determine her as a human being. She goes further than the purely psychological, her impulses come from a deeper layer of her being. And in the case of Sterling Hayden the husband, it's rather similar. He is a man who has a theory about the migration of birds and is determined to prove it. But he comes to distrust somewhat his own motives and the utility of his theory, and therefore his behaviour is tinged with a certain irony towards himself and his situation, he consciously adopts certain values which he knows belong to the past. That's why I used the Orff score, to emphasize the irony, the humour, and at the same time the way he takes things over-seriously. In the end he is obliged to act in a very definite way, which wasn't at all what he initially intended, his plans for himself, his conception of himself had been rather different. He suddenly has to make the relationship with his wife more important than his theory about the birds.

Do you see it as a film about the bourgeoisie?

No. Not about the bourgeosie as such. It's a film about a bourgeois couple, true, but it's more a film about dissatisfaction — maybe about the kind of dissatisfaction that comes with being bourgeois? For me, it's ultimately a film about freedom — and love, or rather about the way these two things are connected. The couple are people who are enclosed in a bourgeois way of thinking, even on their island, outside their normal circumstances, and unconsciously, they are trying to break out, escape from their own situation. They are both deeply dissatisfied. He about his birds and the way he is not getting anywhere with his theory, and she is obsessed by an idea of love which she is not so much unable to realize physically — because she does eventually — but to make palpable, assume consciously and with conviction. So that the search for freedom joins that for love, but in this love there is a definite element of the vampire. Vampirism and love are closely allied for me, by the idea of blood, also destruction, even if it's something new that arises, it passes through a stage of destruction of which the woman in *Sweet Hunters* is very conscious. She uses the fugitive quite deliberately, she tries to possess him, and even though he rejects this, she makes him almost cruelly dependent on her. Her impulse is so strong that in a sense she couldn't care less whether she does is evil or not. Love in this film has a perfectly destructive side, and I wanted to bring out this egotism, which however isn't a moral one, it goes deeper.

I noticed that in your films people are always waiting, and the action is structured around the tension inherent in waiting. In Os Cafajestes *the two men are waiting at the fortifications for the girls to arrive, and you shoot the scene so that we feel their boredom as well as their restlessness. They are smoking, swallowing pep pills, wandering around, and all the time there is this tension, which is the more memorable for not being strictly "dramatic". In* Os Fuzis *the peasants are waiting for the rain and the soldiers for the lorries to arrive, and there the tension engendered by the two kinds of inactivity finally explodes in the "Gaucho" running amok. Finally, in* Sweet Hunters *the strain on the couple partly derives from the seemingly endless and to the wife also pointless waiting for the migrating birds to arrive. Is this in any way a personal theme, or do you use it as narrative device to produce this kind of potentially revealing tension?*

It's true, though I've so far never been quite conscious of it, that waiting plays an important role in my films. Individuals have quite different conceptions of time, the condition of waiting draws out the impulse towards changing life, or their situation, but I guess some people just wait in hope things do change of their own accord, and in this sense, the theme of waiting has a certain social basis, in that the people I'm most often concerned with in my films, large parts of their lives consist of waiting, there is a certain apathy which can suddenly erupt into violence. And maybe it has something to do with myself. Whatever the film one is making, whatever its subject — and even if one is making a so-called "political" film, say, like *Os Fuzis*, the themes one is treating are always pretty well the same, the same way of looking at the world, one's feeling for things and for people.

The imposed situation of waiting, then, seems very often to come into conflict with the inner drive of the characters to manifest themselves in action, so that there is a dialectic in such situations between the objective social and historical conditions which you portray (which may be contradictory to the point of appearing static) and the subjective "psychological" experience of it by the protagonists. Is this a conscious differentiation you are making there?

I think so. The waiting has to come from the action itself, from the overall situation, and this makes for a very sustained emotional charge which I try to mobilize in the characters.

"THE GODS AND THE DEAD" (1970)

Your films contain a very striking use of music, not only the score in Sweet Hunters, *but also the music in* The Gods and the Dead. *What role does music assume in your films?*

Music for me is never used descriptively, but rather figures as a character in his own right. This is particularly true of the Orff score which was written to be performed and therefore already contained a very visual element. Furthermore, Orff had done research on the rhythms, it's a very telluric music, very much tied to the earth and the soil, and in a sense very African, and we tried to put the music as a kind of chorus, which looks at the characters, it ironizes them a little, while at the same time showing concern for their fate. Hence the music intervenes in the action with a great deal of violence, not so much to underline things, but to open up a character, as it were, and to give the spectator another angle on him.

I was struck by the scene in The Gods and the Dead *when Othon Baston kills the piglet. As the knife goes down the music sets in and the effect is to take the film into a different register, change its level of significance, modulate the flow of the action while it continues visually.*

Yes, that is it. It is as if the film was all of a sudden changing colour or something like that. In *The Gods and the Dead* the music has again this function of a character, and except for one occasion, the music never terminates with the scene, but stops prior to it. This is because I always sense the need to get back into a more "natural" feel, in order to facilitate the change of scene or set-up. With music one is automatically in a more interior world. So the sequences always end on a "concrete" register, that is the physical action of the characters.

You seem to attribute a great importance to the rhythm of your films.

Yes. Partly because I have a great interest in music, partly because it's what gives a film its life. I work very intensively on the montage, at the same time very quickly, because I believe that the rhythm of work, i.e. the amount of time one takes over the cutting, will somehow be reflected in the film itself. If I give myself too much time, I come to posing myself false problems, and I often work 18 hours a day on the montage, so as to stay inside the film while I'm cutting it.

MISE-EN-SCENE

There is a certain fondness in your films of the straight line: a corridor, railway tracks, a deserted street which give your images an almost geometrical shape. Has this any larger, structuring significance?

I work very hard on the individual shot, in its graphic pictorial sense. An image for me is a surface and an extension, framing, getting the perspectival lines which has to be organized, by means of worked out and so on. This affects the use of decor in relation to the action. But at the same time, there is a rather intuitive element involved. I have to respond positively to the decor, the environment before I can do anything with it, I have to feel a certain pleasure, things have to fall into place, and only when somehow this feeling doesn't produce itself, then I start thinking. And then I notice, say, that the perspective isn't right, that the background is flat, when in fact it ought to have an opening somewhere out on to an exterior, or that there is depth when you want is an enclosed space, and that sort of consideration gets a lot of my time. Decor for me is an interior dimension which the action 'exteriorizes'. By his this I mean that the behaviour of a character manifests itself in concrete terms in the decor, even when he is immobile. And conversely, I use the decor in such a way that it achieves a maximum of rapport precisely with the 'psychology' of the characters, without thereby making this behaviour necessarily psychological.

In other words, your style, your mise-en-scene is a consequence of your themes, your dramatic intentions at any given point?

When I'm setting up a scene, there is a whole graphic pattern about the movements of the camera in relation to the action in my head. There are, so to speak, straight lines, twisted lines, crossed lines, tangents, curves, movements developing along one or several axes, so that both the action and the camera obey a certain graphic design. And this design results from the interaction of decor and character, locale and action.

I was very struck by the way you thematize the graphic elements in your films, for example, the way a straight line often corresponds to a certain impulse towards action, directed action, but then these lines also lose themselves on an indistinct horizon, as if this impulse towards efficient action was somehow annihilated by the vastness of the space surrounding it.

That's it.

You also seem to have a fairly pronounced preference for scenes where there is first a background, then a character enters the frame in the foreground from the side. What is the significance for you of this?

All my camera movements, except in very special cases, are **on** the characters, in other words, if there are two characters, the camera would never pass from one character to another through an empty space, the camera never has a life of its own, it's always linked either to a human field of vision or a movement. The camera always follows something. This concretizes and gives at every point a 'full' action — even in the dialogue passages. I'm very conscious of plastic values, of the value of space and matter. That's why I like to take my characters from very close and at the same time place them in a real context, I don't like to do a scene wholly in close-ups, because it gives a sense of abstraction which bores me. Of course, there are always exceptions for special cases, where such an abstraction is what one is looking for. My whole vision of things is to be very close to the characters and very close to the decor at the same time. Hence the fluctuations, the to and fro of the camera between long-shots and medium to close-ups. Also, speaking of the distribution of volume and mass, I often frame characters in outline, because I think shape and size can sometimes say more than a glance. You see, in this respect, I'm not at all psychological. I think a facial expression may tell the spectator less than, say, the outline of someone's shoulders.

Does this correspond in your opinion to two levels of the image — the level of presence and that of consciousness, as one finds it in certain American films, where the background, as it were, exteriories the characters' inner life?

Given that I always try to escape from individual psychology and to render an emotion, I'm inevitably obliged to think about how to portray the reflective dimension of a character. I very much like to accentuate an idea which happens inside the characters with something real in the exterior world which can render this idea in a direct and immediate manner. Giving the knife to somebody is giving him death and in *The Gods and the Dead I show* a dead guy in the corner of the room. This is concretizing an interior aspect. If I can find something in the decor which can give me that, be it a geometrical line, or a perspectival alignment, or an opening to a door, or on the level of colour, say I work with the red of the girl in *The Gods and the Dead*, then that's fine. I'm very rigorous on the level of the shooting script, I never make a camera-movement or shoot a shot which is simply descriptiv, for which I don't feel the inner necessity. That's why I never simply pan because that is what I would call descriptive. I only make camera-movements which are linked to a structure of thought.

You mentioned that you are interested in rendering emotion. It seems to me that the "emotion" you are interested in not only plays between the characters on the screen, but sometimes, even aggressively, between the film and the spectator. I'm thinking in particular of the scene in Os Cafajestes, *when the two characters drive endlessly in circles round the naked girl. The scene is particularly revealing, I think, because in a certain sense, it is almost a metaphor of the whole film; just as the car — and the camera — circle interminably round the girl prostrate on the ground, so the film seems to dig itself deeper and deeper into this situation of a pointless emotional violence which finds no issue in action. The scene seems quite deliberately to go on beyond its point of maximum dramatic or psychological impact, it becomes to the audience a kind of poignant anticlimax, which implicitly defines the mood of the rest of the film.*

I'm glad that the scene comes across like this, because I wanted that its primary connotation should be a physical one, and people at the first showing were in fact almost squirming in their seats, saying stop, stop, that's enough. But I wanted to translate the psychological significance

An "American" dynamic of violence.
The Gods and the Dead . . .

of the situation into actual duration.

There is one scene in Os Fuzis, *where I think this ambiguous physical involvement of the spectator conveys perfectly the contradictory nature of the experience portrayed. The scene I'm referring to is the love scene between Mario and the girl, and to me it's one of the most complex and at the same time "realistic" love scenes in the cinema. The girl, torn between the most violently conflicting feelings, driven along this barren corridor between two houses, feeling disgust at Mario's complicity with the casual murder of the shepherd, and yet also a strong physical attraction and an infinite need to have some human contact in her bleak world, the innate sense of class solidarity, of moral identification with her people, battling with the assertion of her emotional rights as an individual and woman, all this creates a powerful dialectic, which the film translates into movement and duration.*

I'm also very fond of this scene, I think it says precisely what it is intended to say. Obviously it's no accident that the episode takes place in the context of the wake for the old guy, with all the contradictions implicit in this wake.

BRAZIL AND THE CINEMA NOVO

Like so many other scenes in Os Fuzis *one gets a strong sense of how necessarily interrelated are the economic situation, military and political institutions, religion, the social and the sexual basis of power structures. The film as a whole seems to be saying that these are all 'values' that count in the progress and change in a given society.*

I don't think one can imagine a transformation of Brazil, either of society as a whole or in respect of personality structures, without for instance taking into account the religious and mystical factor. I, for one, am not a believer, I'm an atheist and I've never had a religious crisis in my life. Nonetheless there is definitely a mystical streak in my nature, because I'm fascinated by what goes on on the level of non-rational cognition, and I'm very attracted by magic and the whole spectrum of values associated with it. Ordinarily, these values are narrowed and reduced by organized religion, for in actual fact the manifestations of religious knowledge are much more diversified. The Brazilians have a religion, a black, 'tropical' religion, and it is still deeply embedded in Brazilian society, even in the upper bourgeoisie. It implies a way of seeing things which one might call intuitive, but which I prefer to regard as part of the unconscious, the unconscious of the people. Obviously, in the unconscious of the Brazilian people, the mystical coordinate so to speak is very powerful and it's also the impulse that is most immediately present.

This may be one of the reasons why our films are occasionally rather difficult ,because we often make films which do not solely start from rational events, but from the collective unconscious. Of course, this collective unconscious is very difficult to grasp and even more difficult to represent — it manifests itself in things that seem arbitrary or that lend themselves to different interpretations. From a certain perspective, our films seem a little hazy, but that is also their richness. They are rich, but at the same time a bit out of focus, as it were.

What has struck me about a number of Brazilian films I have seen is that they are very much concerned with bringing out a sense of vitality, an almost visceral optimism in the characters — but which doesn't easily find an adequate cinematic expression. To me it is often indistinguishable from rather theatrical hamming. In your own films this sense of a sustained inner dynamic appears far more integrated cinematically, an element of the mise-en-scene and the overall structure, rather than as something directly transmitted by the play of the actors and gestural historionics.

In some ways I proceed in an inverse manner from that practised by most other Brazilian film-makers. They normally have their script written and then proceed to find a suitable location. I personally can't even start to write a scene until I have already found the setting. A scene exists to me — prior to finding the location — only on the level of the theme, everything else develops from the concrete setting. Dialogues change, gestures and movements change according to whether a scene takes place in a bathroom or the living room, because after all, in a film it is the actual material presence which shaps the rest, including the words.

One of the things which must change when Brazilian films are shown abroad is the nature of the communication between film and audience. There is, apart from a different gestural language also a different rhythm, often a rather languid one, which tends to go against the grain of conventionalized cinematic expectations. Are there other than temperamental reasons for this?

It is difficult for me to answer this, but I think it comes both from a different conception of the cinema, i.e. a deliberate protest against certain forms of cinematic discourse and from a different idea of the rhythm of life itself.

When you make your films, have you a very clear idea of the expectations which the public will bring to the film?

When I started making films, I said to myself — up to the fifth film you'll experiment and after that it's for real. I still think this is somehow true. There has to be a kind of personal research, there are things one has to get out of one's system. So far, I have always made the kind of film I wanted to make and in the manner in which I wanted to make it. Even if this manner of working has proven to be very costly for me. I have always stuck to it nonetheless because filming gives me an enormous pleasure, and I'd very much like to leave it that way and not turn it into a professional chore. Right now I feel that I have acquired a cinematic language which belongs to me in that it conveys efficiently what I want it to express. Also, I now know the technicians and the crew with whom I can work in this direction, which is very important. In other words, I feel I have the human material and a lived experience that allows me to make films the way I want.

I'd like to believe that I can now make a film which on the level of communication with the spectator goes a lot further than my previous films. The language I have used hitherto has been somewhat oblique in relation to the public, though the public after all is beginning to become far more receptive and capable of understanding this kind of language. Even so, the element of direct communication is very important, and I'm conscious that before one can say things, one first has to come to terms with the ways of getting them across. In the last instance, however, it's a personal language that gives conviction to what one says, even if it is borrowed from a whole range of cinematic idioms. There has to come a moment where after having swallowed it all, one vomits out what one cannot digest and absorb. I think I have reached this point now, and I can make a more direct cinema. What I like is a cinema of action, even if it is a character alone in a room — that still can be made into an action film. I think it was Kobayashi who said when someone asked him what his favourite project was: a four-hour film about a man sitting by the river thinking. And I'm sure one could make a film of great action out of this. So that is what I think I'm going in the direction of a greater dialogue with the public.

Presumably the Brazilian public, like any other public, is rather habituated to the Hollywood cinema?

That's for sure. Mind you, on a certain level, the Brazilian public has other keys of comprehension and communication as well, but nonetheless it remains equivalent to the 'international' public created by Hollywood. As far as I am concerned, I have certainly been influenced by this tradition to some extent, especially the films of the 'thirties and 'forties, which was really an astonishing period. When I went to the movies in South America, naturally it was mostly Hollywood films, and what I learned was a certain efficaciousness on the primary level of characterization, a certain economy in the dramatic narrative, a great justness of tone... all the vitality of a cinema of action — and these are things that the Americans seem to be losing under the influence of the European cinema. The great names of the 'thirties, say Walsh or King Vidor ,these were directors who had a sense for the natural qualities of the decor and the material — and that is what they embodied in their narrative. There is something else (I'm currently trying to re-see some of the movies of that period) which strikes me very forcibly. Normally one thinks of the American cinema as given over entirely to action, but as a matter of fact, these films are often based very much on the spoken word, and the mise-en-scene is so dynamic that it virtually absorbs the word, so that even in the most verbal scenes,

. . . .and King Vidor's Ruby Gentry

one's feeling is that of a very sustained and continuous action. There is no doubt that this cinema not only has a very strong appeal for me, it has also to a considerable extent formed me as a film-maker.

I think the sense of a sustained and at the same time carefully controlled inner dynamism is what communicates strongly in your own films, even more, as in The Gods and the Dead, *because of the language problem, a lot of the plot escaped me. One immediately feels that what is happening is important, not because it might be symbolic of something, but because it creates a field of energy to which the whole composition and the setting responds. Maybe this electrifying quality partly reflects your interest in the relations of power and the psychological rapports of force between individuals, and of course there is also the strong erotic undercurrent in your films. At times in* Os Cafajestes, *especially in the night scenes on the beach, I was somehow reminded of Dorothy Malone in a film by Douglas Sirk . . .*

. . . oh yes, the one with the stunt-fliers. And there is another one, with the same actors, in colour, a magnificent film — *Written on the Wind*. When *Cahiers* reviewed *Os Cafajestes* at the time, they compared it to Vidor, and they mentioned *Ruby Gentry*, which isn't altogether off the mark, since *Ruby Gentry* is a film I like a lot, the way it is constructed like a musical score round the piece played by Walter Brennan on the harmonica. And then the scene of Jennifer Jones and Heston in the car — it's the kind of love I was aiming at in *Os Cafajestes*.

Do you see a conflict between your interest in 'political' cinema and your love for the cinema of action?

The misunderstanding about 'political' cinema comes, I believe, from a 'symbolic' conception of hero and action, whereas the real problem for a film maker is to do his political thinking by way of perceiving inherently cinematic material politically. In this sense, the American cinema is in fact 'materialist' — even it from an ideological point of view it is a very debatable cinema. A director as 'reactionary' as, say Ford, on the level of his cinematic language, his portrayal of human relationships, in the justness of his treatment of the material, he is a 'materialist'.

In some of Glauber Rocha's films one finds that the rapport between the characters themselves, and the logic of the action, too, are structured according to ideological or anthropological categories of analysis, which for me, at any rate, leave the films paradoxically (given the director's manifest political involvement) quite non-committal.

I'm convinced that what is important in the cinema is the emotion in the spectator. It's part of the film-maker's material. And emotion, for the majority of the public, cannot be given politically, not in a pure state. Intellectual understanding is no substitute for emotional comprehension. However, in a film like *The Lion Has Seven Heads* I find that the 'political emotion' so to speak, has a direct echo in me, but I can well see that a lot of people are not susceptible along this spectrum of values and responses.

What are the conditions, at present, under which the Cinema Nôvo directors can work in Brazil?

In view of the rapid development of the Brazilian film industry in recent years, with something like 120 feature films being made each year, there is now considerable aid being given to the cinema from official sources, but this aid is channelled above all into entertainment films for home consumption. On the other hand, the money is fairly intelligently distributed, so that we, the directors usually grouped as Cinema Nôvo (though this is by now merely a historical label), who after all have a certain reputation both at home and abroad — which is very valuable for the Brazilian government — have access to funds, in spite of the fact that our work is none too kindly viewed by the authorities for what we say about Brazil and the image we give of it. This leaves us a somewhat ambiguous freedom, especially since the money is merely advanced. It has to be re-paid, and if we can't find distribution or we are having trouble with the censor, then the credits can be stopped and pressure be put on us. So there is a definite economic censorship on top of the political one which limits one's room for manoeuvre. But so far there have always been ways of overcoming this, and as long as we can, we carry on.

Jennifer Jones and Charlton Heston: Ruby Gentry.

Book Review

"GODARD ON GODARD": translation and commentary by Tom Milne. Cinema Two (S & W Paperback £1.90)

"Il est difficile, sans ne dire par impossible, de pousser loin la pratique sans la spéculation, et reciproquement de bien posséder la spéculation sans la pratique" Diderot; *L'Encyclopedie.*

"Any great modern film which is successful is so because of a misunderstanding" Jean-Luc Godard; *Cahiers du Cinema* 171.

Firstly, it is necessary to applaud Tom Milne for his brave translation of Godard's sometimes impossible idiosyncracies; for those who do not read French, this highly-priced paperback is essential for an understanding of the director's work at least until 1967 — a period as misunderstood as the present 'political' phase is maligned. Milne's commentary is often excellent in its painstaking research into the more accessible of the throwaway references, and the stills have evidently been chosen with immense care to reflect a wholesale immersion in an unlimited cinematic tradition. Altogether, *Godard on Godard* stands as a monument to creative fertility among the phantom pregnancies of current cinema journalism; as such, it is the responsibility of the critic to understand Godard's writings as the prelude to the comprehension of the work of the most important single talent to emerge in the cinema since the Second World War.

An altogether crucial function of *Godard on Godard* will be its inevitable confrontation with the squeamish over the importance of the American Cinema in the context of the art itself, a subject always treated by the Anglo-Saxon critical establishment in a manner similar to the custom of the director William Dieterle when on the set — that is, with the obsessive delicacy of white kid gloves (and even Richard Roud, in his introduction to Milne's edition, still speaks of Godard's admiration for Frank Tashlin with an effete 'alas', as if in a final effort to restrict that admiration to an intellectual association on the level of an in-joke). Certainly Godard's often reckless aphorisms, spiced with the humour and punning wit reminiscent of the world of Parisian journalism portrayed by Balzac in *Illusions Perdues,* may at times arouse the sceptic; for example in his panegyric of Ray's *Bitter Victory* (pp. 64–6), an article more emotive than analytical, or his short piece on Fuller's *Forty Guns* (pp. 61–2), which nevertheless reveals more of that masterpiece's apocalyptic spirit than a longer more detailed appreciation. No, the importance of Hollywood to Godard is intrinsically related to the dichotomy that informs both his criticism and his films, the relation of a polished narrative cinema, and indeed all cinema, to what one must abstractedly call 'Truth', the extent to which the considered veneer of style dictates the reality that the camera reveals, the problem of whether the truth of that really is abstract, or whether truth is not 'the' vision, but 'a' vision, in other words a perception. His flexible attitude to this efficacy of style and interpretation can be traced from early pieces in *La Gazette du Cinema* to the compact pronouncements of the years with *Cahiers.* And whether Richard Roud likes it or not, among Godard's chosen test-areas for this dichotomy was the world of American Comedy, with its crackling dialogue and its cracking pace, its brittle flashy packaging, whether vulgar (Tashlin), or urbane (Blake Edwards).

The idealism of Godard's early criticism is always tempered by the perverse awareness of the enchantment to which he submitted under the spell of the cinema. Indeed, his awareness leads him to castigate the pseudo-objectivity of an art-documentary (pp. 19–20) and, in an important though abstract review of Maté's *No Sad Songs for Me,* to articulate a paradox out of the problems which haunted him. Of the cinema he writes that while it is "an art of representation, all it knows of interior life are the precise and natural movements of well-trained actors" (p. 22). It is his admiration for sophistication and facility, as well as the awareness of the manipulation behind the veil of 'objectivity', that provokes Godard's intense sympathy for the early films of Mankiewicz and Preminger; what justifies the classically-constructed scripts of these films, for him, is the acute psychological penetration their technique of dramatic selection engendered, the delicate equilibrium between decorum and contingency, their "cunning and precise paraphrase" of reality (p. 28). In his review of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train,* Godard is honest enough to demonstrate this primary justification via an expression of sentimental idealism which is attracted to a cinema of mythical status attained by technical expertise ("genius battening on objects") through a shying away from the stark contingency of the real world (p. 24). In a later, remarkable analysis of another Hitchcock film, *The Wrong Man* (pp. 48–55), he expands this by noting the director's ability to incorporate digression (Balastero reading a newspaper in the subway on his way home from work) within the texture of integrated plot, thus bestowing meaning on the individual moment and giving life the style it lacks; for, as we know, the equilibrium of the thriller or the detective story lies in the subtle transmutation of the apparently peripheral detail. For Godard then, submission to the 'tyranny' of the classical director (and simultaneous awareness and even rejoicing in that tyranny) create a dialectic which investigates the nature of cinematic motivation; "to direct means to scheme and one says of a scheme that it is well or badly mounted" (p. 40). In his early years, Godard is intrigued by traditional cinematic notions of content (charm of the narrative, formulation, pace) i.e. the question of what one may justifiably 'put in' a movie. By 1965 and *Pierrot Le Fou,* he is immersed in the allegiance of narrative, what it conceals rather than reveals.

Made in USA.

If Godard's criticism is always idiosyncratic, it is representative of French critical debate in that its questions — the status of the director, validity of narrative discourse etc. — are formulated in relation to the American Cinema, and the values Hollywood consciously or otherwise imposed in other national film industries. While it is only comparatively recently that English criticism has focussed on Hollywood, it is ironic that this criticism seems nevertheless to have missed the point of Godard's analytical aphorisms. Currently fashionable interpretations of the work of Howard Hawks, whom Godard considered the finest American director, bear witness to this. Here criticism depends on employing the impartiality of this director's perception as a jemmy to force an interpretation working backwards from overt content — a sinister schematisation of'adventure films and comedies which can only apparently be understood as mutual inverses; style becomes the vehicle of a stoic world-vision. Godard too recognises this impartiality; but by contrast he is solely interested in investigating the efficacy of its creative expression, the 'plan américain' or medium waist-shot (the French phrase indicates the indigenous nature of this spatial pattern, forged by the physical-gestural relation of characters in the frame favoured by American sound Comedy). He conducts this by substituting for a classically-constructed script a disconcerting visual continuum which is due to a rigorously consistent mise-en-scene and based entirely on this kind of shot (c.f. *Made in USA*). Thus the only link between *Made in USA* and Hawks' *The Big Sleep* which Godard acknowledges as the inspiration for his own film, is not the increased sense of the stoic ethic resigned to a labyrinthine, morally negligible world, but the interrogatory-analytical force of the 'plan américain' (the framing, radical not formal, of characters in space) after its liberation from the exigencies of classical narrative, transposed to an area of surfaces and appearances, zones of ambiguity. Godard expresses no interest in a conception of Hawks' stoicism, and *Scarface* does not intrigue him because it contains under a vicious narrative of gangsterism the essential paradigm of a Hawksian comedy; he wishes to experiment with the viability of classical style (constructed for a certain purpose, operating within certain limits and in this sense 'coded') against shifting contexts. In this way, Godard is employing a means of articulating one reality as a tool, to anatomise another, he is decomposing 'style', a concept of 'multiple diegesis' more elementary than that outlined by P. Wollen in a recent article on the director (*Afterimage,* Autumn 1972, pp. 7–16). Once Godard praised Vadim for envisaging a dramatic idea in *Et Dieu Créa la Femme* and then transposing it simply and logically according to viewpoint and emphasis onto the screen; in his own films he reverses this process in which the cinema no longer reveals by morally justifiable selectivity but creates its own spontaneous "correspondences".

For Godard then, any radical representation of reality (moral, political) in the cinema must absorb the codifications of the past. In two early articles, "Défence et Illustration du Découpage Classique" (pp. 26–30) and "Montage Mon Beau Souci" (pp. 39–41), he adds a perverse, but important distinction to the axioms of Eisenstein and Bazin in this respect. He is not impressed with the latter's simplistic claims for the development of deep-focus that "the spectator's relationship with the image is nearer to that which he has with the reality"; his view of the means at the disposal of a director is more inclusive. Composition in depth gives a concision to considered dramatic effect by reducing relations between people and objects to single shot, but 'manipulation' of response (or, to put it differently, creation of meaning) is no less apparent, or more real, than with montage. An example from a film Godard reviewed for *Cahiers* bears this out; I mean *Strangers on a Train,* when Senator Morton and his family await Guy's telephone call to tell them that he has been cleared from suspicion of his wife's murder. Hitchcock shows us the telephone in the foreground of the frame, in close-up, with the family seated together in the background; the meaning of the shot, the power of what the object symbolises (vindication of happiness, good name etc.), is as obvious as under the sequential association of editing. The difference lies in sheer context; Hitchcock chooses it precisely because of the comparative primacy of the inert object in relation to the future of the characters, example of an ironic relationship (cf. the cigarette-lighter) permeating the film, and an effect that would have been lost in consecutive shots of telephone and anxious expressions as there is more at stake than merely a temporary connection. A similar example may be extracted from *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?,* where Aldrich, in constructing a maximal suspense effect, demonstrates Joan Crawford's dependence on reaching the telephone while Bette Davis is out of the house by alternately distorting the relationship between object (foreground) and helpless cripple (background) through low-angle camera set-ups dictating relief, and cutting from a slow zoom-in on the one with a static medium shot of the other. The title of the first of the two articles mentioned above is a deliberate hommage on Godard's part to the famous tract on the French language by Joachim du Bellay, member of the celebrated 'Pléiade' of the 16th Century, who advocated all forms of linguistic experiment consciously thought out and justifiable, a flexibility outriding dogma. Their word for such experimentation was 'provignement', grafting-on of technique and effect by such heretically undisciplined methods as analogy. It is a spirit to which Godard remains faithful, citing as his master Renoir, especially in the artful simplicity of his films of the 'thirties. Nevertheless the creative debate engendered here is perhaps more obscured than illuminated by the red-herring of his fiction-documentary terminology (analysed with particular reference to short films and again Malraux p. 132), making a point through the confusion of accepted modes.

Preoccupied with the relationship of image and reality, Godard is also concerned that one method of conveyance is not considered necessarily more real than another, in the same way that editing and camera-movement are not mutually exclusive. But Godard through his paradoxes points the way towards a reversal of the accepted belief about the value of composition in depth. Welles' conception of relief is dramatic rather than realistic for deep-focus heightens existing relationships inside the frame rather than leaving the spectator free to make his own connections; thus Quinlan's conversation with the Night Man

Howard Hawks' The Big Sleep

outside the motel in *Touch of Evil* is demonstration of 'poetic' space, rather than apeing the verisimilitude of an ordinary encounter. Exaggerated dramatic relief is a vehicle for Welles' parabolic imagination in the same way as montage heralds Eisenstein's emotive didacticism. The root of Bazin's sentimental concept of objectivity lies elsewhere, precisely where Godard had remarked on it — the 'plan américain', stylistic feature of American Comedy and hallmark of Hollywood's school of disciplined classicism (Hawks, Henry King etc.). With the value of a fluid detachment for rigorous adherence to the action, the 'plan américain' emphasised the crucial revelatory role of the cinema, "an instrument for discovering the world" as Rohmer puts it, discovering it through the only means at its disposal, the penetration of external appearances. Too often, the term 'realism' means the accumulation of detail within the spectacle, to further the pretence of verisimilitude; a director like Stroheim is mentioned in this context. Stroheim's films are realistic, but here the moral of superficial realism asserts itself, in the belief that the reality behind the spectacle will finally become apparent. *Foolish Wives* eschews camera-movement, as well as the rapid assertion of montage; but through the static medium shot, the motivations of the characters are discovered by the camera (a brief, typically eccentric example; the episode of the ex-soldier with no arms, which begins as a macabre accumulative gag and ends as a metaphor in which Stroheim's method may be glimpsed). And this simultaneous detachment from and submission to the exigencies of the action is, as Godard recognised, the true heritage of the American Cinema, and therefore the crucial stylistic element in the most influential segment of the narrative cinema as we know it; in other words, the most consistent arbiter of reality the art had produced at the time of Godard's investigation. The invention of Cinemascope is of course a fortuitous but somehow inevitable successor to the camera-eye embodied in the 'plan américain', confirming the relevatory aspect of the cinema by proving inimical to decomposing the spectacle into separate elements and thus rupturing an accumulated decorum.

Ultimately then, for Godard, criticism and films are related means of analysing the problematic relation between the camera and the objects that it films. In a short review of Burgess Meredith's *Works of Calder*, he writes that the cinema "consists simply in putting things in front of the camera". (p. 19). Later, when considering *Bitter Victory*, he writes that "one is no longer interested in objects but what lies between the objects and which becomes an object in its turn" an idea to be considered in *Pierrot Le Fou* eight years later. One of the ways that the change thus indicated can be seen is in a less elementary approach to characterisaton, an approach whch is the reverse of Hollywood's where identity is posited and cemented in combined trajectories which can negate individual elements (cf. the traditional 'peripeteia' of the American Cinema's morality of individualism). Godard dissects the architecture of cinematic characterisation by replacing the narrative continuum with one that is merely visual, enabling him to describe subjective and even negative properties (*Une Femme Mariée, Made In USA)*, dissolving the link of the images to a given dramatic context. *Made in USA* has been reduced by baffled critics to a chaotic in-joke, incited by apparently random quotation by Godard of Hollywood's mythical nomenclature. The character of Paula (Anna Karina), whose exploits the film purports to follow, is constantly being redefined by the environment in which she finds herself, by the correspondences Godard elicits through the relation of objects and personnel. No one image defines her; lying on a hotel bed reading a 'série noire' novel, leaning against a wall stuck with torn posters, watching her reflection in a pool — these images, stripped of a rigid plastic sense instead allow the audience to watch a character in construction. Here the decorum of continuity is peeled off by the logic of farce (the simultaneous confessions of Paula and Widmark, the 'choices' of death offered to Typhus and Donald, the combination of "Walt Disney plus blood"). Godard is reversing the method of his masters (the film is dedicated to Fuller and Nick Ray); for in the classical cinema, life is codified (condensed in narrative) and expressed in familiar visual 'forms' (the movements of celebrated actors, paradigms of genre etc). After primary identification of these forms, Godard reduces them to iconographic elements (elements of a manipulated imaginative universe) and isolates them, stripping them of their traditional context and informing them with separate resonances. The screen becomes an arena of visual conflict under the aegis of a colour movie in bright sunlight, chaos the fulcrum for a reassessment of the image-sound relationship; in *Made in USA* the characters search for equilibrium through dialogue — the absurd conversation in the café, Karina's statement of responsibility shot in three 'objective' close-ups (two profile, one head-on), the oblique coda of the closing conversation — while acknowledging the fluidity of the visual continuum via the 'plan américain' design (we recall what Godard writes of the main characteristics of this type of shot; "the extreme disquiet, the inner agitation, in a word... confusion"). This identification-interrogation of visual forms (what the image has become rather than what it is) is traditionally the province of the satirist; perhaps the fact that the debate is here linked so strongly to the director's punning elliptical humour explains the lack of response to the film.

The vindication of Godard's method up to 1967 comes in the image of the coffee-cup surface in *Deux ou Trois Choses Que Je Sais D'Elle*, a poetic image of the universe that unites him more completely with the director of *Rebel Without A Cause* than if he had wallowed in a cinema of reactionary spirit inviting him to endless remakes of *Johnny Guitar*. Godard's rebellion against established forms has been justified by time; the moral linearity which was the mainstay of the classical narrative cinema is now only to be found in debased 'camp' form (*Star Trek*, "Marvel" Comics). He should be allowed the last word: "Filming... is simply seizing an event as a sign, and seizing it at the precise second when gently (a scene from *Lola*), brutally (a shot by Fuller), cunningly (a composition by Bunuel), logically (a sequence from *Voyage to Italy*), the significance springs freely from the sign which conditions and prefigures it".

Peter Lloyd

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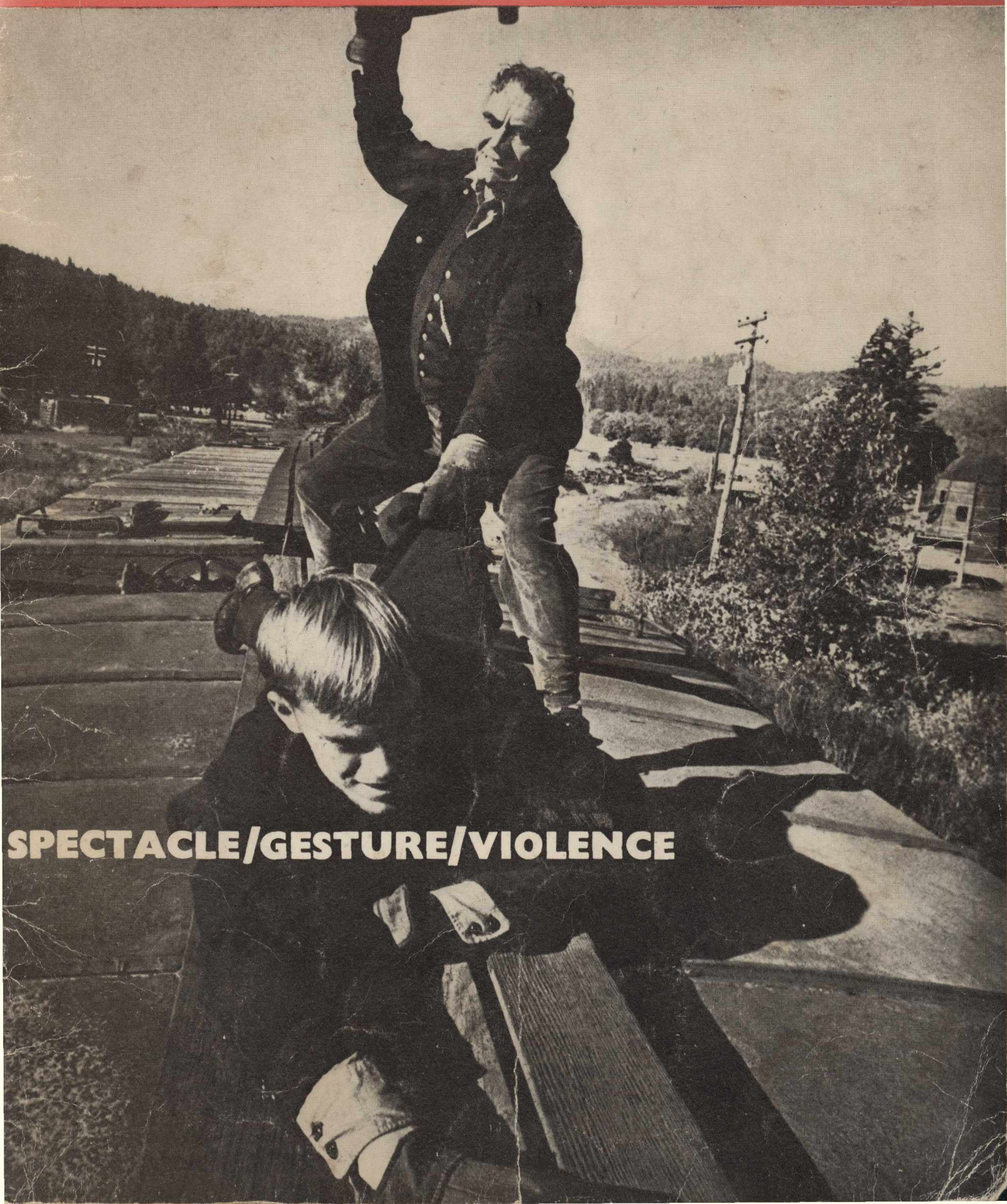

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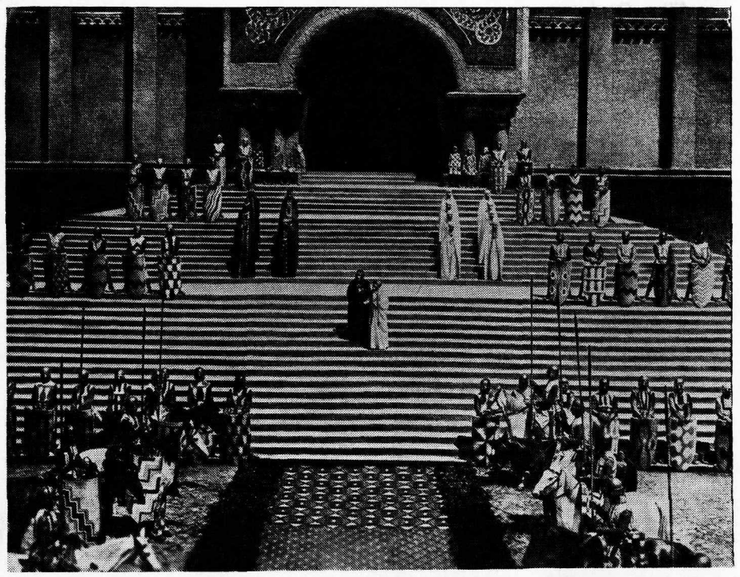
Pageants of violence

Problems on the staging of history



Line, pattern, gesture: the theatrical poise of Lang's Nibelungen

There are ways of talking about the cinema — certain key oppositions, certain time-honoured phrases and gestures — a whole shorthand or repertoire of film journalism which soon becomes familiar to anyone who takes the least interest (beyond a perfunctory reading of weekly reviews) in what used to be called the cinema as art form. *One wants to lie in wait for these phrases and capture them when they are off-guard. What does it mean to talk about — to go talking about — "auteur" and "genre", montage and realism, appearance/reality as if these terms and terms like them did not have to be constantly revalidated and* forged a new *in succeeding epochs of criticism? Thus the question arises which the following article tries to formulate, how above all can* realism — *the realism of classical commercial cinema — be discussed intelligently while at the same time accommodating the knowledge of how irrevocably in modern film writing realism is distrusted? The emphasis placed by the "semiology" of such different writers as Noel Burch, Peter Wollen, and the editorial board of Screen magazine on the activity of criticism as the "deconstruction" of a transparent and fluent film-text into its signifying particles can be interpreted — perhaps even misinterpreted — as the disdainful rejection of all those narrative ruses which function to keep the surface of the movie tight and coherent and in a word (shorthand) "realistic". And yet in this polemic the precise definition of cinema's style or realism remains curiously unexamined. At what utopian point between "naturalism" and caricature does classical American cinema offer — in Sirk's phrase — its imitation of life? It is here, incidentally, that one might be excused for finding puzzling the current use made of Brecht as a figurehead in whom the various important avant-garde concepts are subsumed: whereas one would have thought that it was the Brecht who had something to say about, precisely, realism who had most to offer the potential critique of the Hollywood aesthetic. One invokes here of course not only the biographical fact of Brecht's personal artistic preferences (realism, but again, what* kind *of realism?), but more specifically the fruitful concept of social "gestus", elaborated in Walter Benjamin's essays recently translated into English as* Understanding Brecht *(New Left Books 1973). It is exactly as the continuing analysis of* gesture *in the Hollywood cinema (initiated for our purposes by Thomas Elsaesser's article on melodrama in Monogram 4) that the following piece takes its cue. Gesture is the moment of connection between acting and mise-en-scène which allows one to speak of the character of traditional narrative cinema as being* both *"naturalistic" (to a far greater extent than the stage can ever allow)* and *at the same time stylized, "typical", epic, the vehicle not so much of* social *mannerisms (except where it is specifically satirical), but of social manner itself. It is between these dialectical poles that the realism of Hollywood and in fact of European cinema begins to be defined more interestingly. On the one hand a unique, non-repeatable instant — a glance, say between actress and actor in Rossellini's* Viaggio in Italia *— of such irrecoverable beauty that it is no longer right to talk about acting, so perfect is the naturalism: and on the other hand the fact of that scene's being filmed in traditional reverse diagonal over-the-shoulder shots, locking the protagonists into a tableau of formalised intensity as, to speak metaphorically, previous generations of artists had accomplished with such fervour only in painting (Caravaggio, Rubens, Delacroix). One chooses as an example a moment of emotional resonance simply to stress that realism in the cinema cannot be considered outside its affective, "phatic" context: the sense in other words — which goes far to define cinema as a popular art, and brings in of course its whole mechanics of audience identification, shock, suspence, eroticism etc — of lived experience whereby cinema translates abstract issues into moral conflicts and uses the human body itself as the vector of those conflicts. The exceptionally formalised way by which in the cinema mental and moral distinctions are exteriorised into physical energy and gesture is only one of the more puzzling aspects of any attempt to define film as a realistic medium. Gesture itself sustains an incredibly complicated balance between the real, the ideal and the remembered; criticism in the past has dealt with it mainly in relation to epic, where one gets, for example in Homer, a kind of repertoire of repeated descriptive devices which have nothing to do with a lack of originality on the part of the poet, but which function (as perhaps do the stock ruses of melodrama) on an altogether more sophisticated aesthetic economy largely related to epic's oral (and therefore more literally "phatic") origins. Presided over by the goddess Mnemosyne, epic is the fertile concourse of both reverie and realism — as is the cinema! In either case one has the strange feeling of seeing something not only for the first time, but as* if we have always known it. *It is not for nothing that especially in movies scenes of intense, heightened realism are referred to as as "hallucinatory". The combination of eroticism, visual clarity and "narrative" dynamics makes the realism of cinema similar in many ways to the realism of dreams — as the recent vogue for psychoanalysing individual movies (Welles, Hitchcock) is beginning to find out.*

This is the somewhat dangerous ground *on which the film researcher currently finds himself. Where does history come into his speculations? Well then: to the extent that his investigation is worthwhile, he will find the reflection history gives out assimilated into cinema not so much in terms of content as of form. In which case, and assuming these forms develop, is not his use of the term* classical *problematic, and where, so far as Hollywood is concerned, can classicism be located?*

It is here that some of the contentions of the following article have come to seem provisional. Having pitched one's main area of investigation in the classical American cinema, and restricted it for the purposes of convenience to asking how that cinema deals with history, one is caught in the problem of how modern *American cinema manages to continue developing its own autonomous forms. It is this continual search (eg through the harnessing of nostalgia) for a vocabulary to express experience (pathos) divorced from the reified modalities of tragedy, that these notes are just in danger of being too moralising about.*

Whereas the second feature article of this issue attempts to take a closer look at this very question, identifying the problems of parody and self-consciousness that go with it, but also the continuing inventiveness and intelligence; and finally trying to assess in this tentative and interim period of filmmaking the overall chances of success and failure.

> "The angles are a director's thoughts. The lighting is his philosophy. Even to this extent: long before Wittgenstein, I and some of my contemporaries learned to distrust language" (Douglas Sirk from *Sirk on Sirk* (1971) ed. J. Halliday p. 40)

The pressures of distance, availability and finally of interest combine to qualify the ways in which one can speak of the seven or eight main English language film journals as being in debate. Yet there remains a tentative sense in which issues seem to recur, whether these issues are treated superficially or with the utmost obliqueness. Among these the rediscovery, if not the wakening up to the wealth and complexity of Hollywood's past by a growing number of American film writes seems to offer as a ready made subject the investigation of the relations between cinema and history.

Yet this current mood of retrospective which characterizes the latest excellent issues of so many American film magazines might equally serve to soften what debate there is in a haze of nostalgia. Why is it that the "special issue" on such and such a topic of Hollywood history — the work of a particular studio in a given era, for example — so invariably fails to come up to the mark? The *incisive analysis* one dreamed of is lost in a collection of articles that remain obstinately heterogeneous. Doubtless these are conjunctures — ideological and aesthetic — which continue to be better written about, more hardly driven, in Europe than in the United States. The need in America for a dynamic, modern, political cinema to replace the work of the *old masters* is a salutary reminder that, properly grasped, the writing about history is only another way — only a more convenient way — of writing about the present. Yet when all is said, Hollywood continues to offer a mediated series of interpretations of its own and America's past history which, taken together, still constitutes an amazingly impressive body of work.

One of the most interesting elements of this has always been the way that the ideological residue of American pictures — as it comes out through the success of certain genres, certain formulae, — cannot be pinned down as easily as it can in the European cinema to some simple notion of the auteur. Unlike the novel, the cinema revels in composite authorship, the strands of which are only beginning to be individually disentangled. The process will be long and interesting and more complicated than auteur criticism ever dreamed of. The particular studios involved, the present demands of the market, the lack of availibility of some directors and the coercion of others — in a word the *politics* of Hollywood filmmaking have to be taken into account and made to stand as certain evidence where for the first time one can begin to see the phenomenon of Hollywood historically. Thus, as far as history is concerned it is the fact that we are not offered in the American cinema a single artist's "interpretation of events" (as, in literature, Stendhal or Tolstoy might write about the Napoleonic wars) which provides the whole interest and difficulty. The promiscuous origins of these movies are all the greater challenge to those who set out to analyse them — or to psychoanalyse them!

But first, an older debate. "The Cinema and History": an investigation along these lines might seem to presuppose an interest in one genre above others. We are now so used to the filmed epic — the historical spectacular — that it is hard even if we have for the thousandth time witnessed its astonishing incarnation in Griffith to grasp the full importance of its being the cinema's single major contribution to the vocabulary of artistic forms. Yet up until recently it would be more usual to cite the Epic, especially where it comes out of Hollywood, as the very evidence of the cinema's stupidity. The liberation of the crowd from the statuesque incapacity it enjoyed on the stage of even such progressive directors as Meyerhold (not to mention the ritualised and, as the phrase is, "reactionary" dramas of

Gordon Craig) was seen as nothing more than certain proof of the cinema's total incapacity to distinguish between *showing* a particular series of events and, in the timeless comparison, *reflecting* on them. The distinction remains to plague aesthetic thinking on drama and film, more particularly in the hands of an eclectic marxist criticism, *as a stick to beat cinema with.* This is the explanation for the otherwise unaccountable fervour with which the debate (to my mind factitious) *montage versus neo-realism* is kept alive: montage, so the argument runs, providing the dialectical, objective, positioning element of a given scenario, against which the naive claims of a realistic cinema are always to be confounded.

Yet the mention of Meyerhold and Craig serves as a reminder that even before their time the rival positions *presentation against interpretation* had been debated in terms of a specifically theatrical mise-en-scene. In fact, in the nineteenth century it was exactly over the question of how to mount historical drama that the argument first became acrimonious, and where was first heard the now common complaint that the emphasis on *size* and *accuracy* in props and costumes was somehow importunate and unnecessary. In due course murmurs against the "realistic" setting of Shakespeare and Hugo's grandiose historical pageants became, mutatis mutandis, the dissatisfaction felt with the naturalistic drama of the eighties and nineties. The *real carcass of beef* displayed in a stage production of Antoine's Theatre Libre at this period, and which supposedly did for the theatre what Zola was accomplishing in the novel, that is, symbolised a certain standard of authenticity, was somehow *felt to miss the point.* The reaction against this slavish adherence to fact was formulated in terms of an experimental theatre, pioneered, as is well documented elsewhere, by artists precisely of the calibre of Craig and Meyerhold. It only needed a robust and highly intelligent tradition of marxist dramaturgy concerning itself very specifically with questions of history to cement the point that accuracy as such has very little to do with understanding the process of history — always supposing that it is the process of history rather than any of its other manifestations that is the agreed desideratum.

This view of the legitimate aims of staged historical epic — a view one might for the sake of convenience call "Brechtian" in its more intelligent incarnations — is by now so much taken for granted, and with it a preference for a formalised, abstract method of staging such drama, that it is very hard to make any discriminations. At the risk of sounding the obvious note it is necessary to insist first and foremost that the cinema is not the theatre. One of the consequences of the development of cinema in the last fifty years is that it has imperceptibly solved some elements of the rival theories of drama I have been talking about — or rather, made them no longer an issue. No one now feels constrained as they did when confronted with Stanislavski's productions to shout "Down with realism!" The cinema has appropriated the real world so successfully that the representation of natural objects is no longer problematic, since they no longer function in quite the same way *as props* to swamp the drama with verisimilitude and thus deprive it of its point. It is as if by the simple fact of being photographed they cease to become importunate: or, to put it another way, they cease to become symbolic; this is to say, they cease to become aggressively symbolic — which in the majority of cases amounts to the same thing. In fact one of the unexamined triumphs of the cinema as opposed to the stage is the delicacy with which symbolism can again be handled — making the films of Losey or Hitchcock, for instance, a marvellous demonstration of how the camera effects (that is, realises, makes possible) the metaphorical status of the objects it focusses on.

I think similar qualifications, in terms of how the cinema solves certain issues of representation, could be extended to how it deals with the large general problem of history. The very fact that the debate between "montage" and "realism" is so old absolves us at the outset from insisting that there is any correct way of representing historical spectacle. History itself — who needs reminding? — is but an interpretation of events, and there are numerous examples available in literature to prove that there are insights to be gained even when the tale is recounted from what might ironically be called the wrong angle (it was Ezra Pound who summarised this defence of a dissenting view of history in the Malatesta Cantos: "Sono tutti eretici, signor Pio, ma non sono cattivi" etc.) Perhaps to mention Pound is already to give the wrong emphasis. One is interested here not so much in theories or interpretations of history with the implied correlative of an objective, controlling intelligence (whether that intelligence belongs to Pound or to Brecht), as in extrapolating from effects which have more to do with intrinsic qualities of the medium than with their treatment in the hands of individual artists. The first of these brings us back to the cinema's greater capacity for crude realism, glossed at its simplest as *accuracy* of costumes, setting, pageant and battle scenes. Traditionally this realism is felt to be inopportune or even fatuous because it coexists with an even greater *lack* of realism in other features of the production, notably dialogue, the careless ruin of many a Hollywood spectacular. Anachronism can be accommodated and even encouraged on the stage (as it frequently is in Shaw where it passes for a deliberate aimed effect), but not in the cinema where it lacks a literary alibi and can safely be relegated in the critic's imagination to the assumed incompetence of some "hack" screenwriter. The best answer to this, as I shall argue later, is simply that dialogue is relatively unimportant — most easily proved by seeing the epic in question in a foreign language, preferably one the spectator knows as little as possible.

The whole question of what constitutes "literariness" in these matters is of the greatest interest. The irony is that the stage itself with its far greater premium on the spoken word has been unable to solve in the twentieth century the issue of a plausible spoken drama; hence many experiments, ranging from the solemn to the kitsch, in the direction of forging a new verse form suitable for the stage. The cinema could be said to solve this dilemma simply in the relative lack of emphasis it places on the spoken gesture. This is part of its own lucky development, since we don't need to be reminded that in the era of the *silent screen* the issue was looked after more completely than ever. There simply was no spoken dialogue; the banal quality of the sub-titles which accompanied the narrative (so great a stumbling block to even the most sophisticated modern audience) properly glossed merely underlines what for me is the always productive discrepancy between the perfunctory, ad-hoc origins of the plot, and the compelling emotional intensity by which it was so often in the event realised.

Epic reconstructions: the Moors in Anthony Mann's El Cid

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Does this mean that interest in cinematic spectacle is entirely based on its qualities as a visual spectacle? For the reasons already touched on this seems an unrespectable point of view, although if painting rather than the cinema were considered it would be reasonable enough. I take it, for instance, that no one would dream of taxing Delacroix with the accusation that his magnificent, sombre historical canvases were "merely spectacle". So with the cinema: it cannot be said too often that the lavishly authenticated background — so easily dismissed — of the best Hollywood epics of the 50's and 60's is the result of pains and of creative intelligence. This is partly a function of money, of course, and partly an historical accident: the availability of fine designers and craftsmen who were capable of executing plans on this scale. The decisive reward in all this is not so much magnificence and grandeur (although in *El Cid* there are a series of tableaux in which the colour red receives perhaps its most astonishing definition since the Renaissance), as the confirmation or reminder, which the stage is unable to provide, that, as it were, so much of history takes place *out of doors.* The consequence of this has as much to do with the anonymous crowd of extras who, so to speak, flesh out the canvas, as it has to do with the principal actors themselves. In the theatre the staging of crowd scenes has always been difficult and became doubly so in Russia when, in the wake of 1917, the crowd was transformed from mute spectators of history into its major architect. By 1905 the naturalistic stage business of the popular Meiningen stage troupe which had held sway for twenty years, whereby each extra had his own movements carefully rehearsed and differentiated from his neighbour, was replaced by Craig with a theory of mass movement more in keeping with the hieratic, ritualised quality of his dramaturgy. Meyerhold, in turn, was to celebrate the newly-enfranchised "Mass-Man" with a theory of stage movement known as Biomechanics, derived in part from the psychology of William James, which formally if not ideologically repeated the emphasis Craig had established on crowd movement as *abstract gesture.* It was Griffith in the cinema, and following him Eisenstein and Lang, who, unencumbered with high-flown theories of movement, almost by accident liberated the crowd from the director's whim, so that "history" for audiences in those early filmed epics became an overwhelming sense of *being there.* This sense of experiencing events as they occur which is the outcome of the cinema's triumphant naturalism — the reward of all that authenticity of recreation — remains for the epic its most distinguishing characteristic, upsetting in the process the uneasy, cliched opposition between montage and neo-realism, so that the salient comparison is not, as the standard film histories claim, between a film that shows a series of actions and a film that suggests the causes of those actions (between, say, Pabst's *Westfront 1918* and Dovzhenko's *Arsenal,* to use the example from Siegfried Kracauer), but, overwhelmingly, between the cinema and theatre itself.

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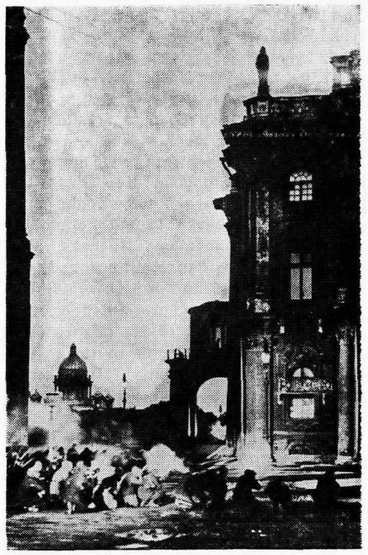
It goes without saying that the view of history expressed in such movies has little to do with historical materialism. Of the major epics of the directors already mentioned, Griffith's *Intolerance* forwards a teleological and religious rationalization of history, Lang's *Nibelungen* no less than Wagner's translates history into saga, Eisenstein's *Ivan* presents a clear case of history in the service of ideology, and it is the very point of the closing sequences of Anthony Mann's epic that his hero El Cid rides out of history into legend. Yet it is only fair to add that there remains, when all is said, a sense in which the traditional opposition between montage and realism, serving as a shorthand distinction between American and Russian theories of classical film-making, has a certain usefulness. It is perhaps odd that the distinction is not always so automatically in favour of the Russians as is sometimes thought; (in Eisenstein's late writings there is a kind of *fetishization* of montage that seems to me dubious, even politically. In terms of a supposed rigour of statement it simply cannot carry the weight it is meant to bear). To take an obvious instance of this contrast, the premium which montage places on "comment" implies a whole cinema of allusion and with it the invocation of an extra-cinematic set of conventions and expectations, in contrast to the more self-contained codes and self-generating discourse of Hollywood. Allusion in its literary incarnation is only another word for irony and it is in the Russian cinema of the heroic early years that we find, with all its febrile experimentation, the completest example of a traditionally theatrical, polemical, allusive conception of mise-en-scene: a satirical cinema boldly availing itself of an awakened and shared political culture. Soviet film-making of those years was a critical and allusive enterprise, where it could be assumed that the joke about Kerensky turning into a peacock *(October)* needed no further explanation.

This kind of open confrontation with recent history — literally, a *restaging* of history which finds its culmination in the kind of grand gesture of *October* or *The End of St. Petersburg* where whole sections of a city are taken over to re-enact events still relatively fresh in the minds of the combatants — does not exist in the American cinema, where the issues (crime, politics, class struggle or whatever) are deflected into genres and emerge in a more mediated, complex, dissipated form (that is their interest), often enough — in contrast to the artistic avant-garde of the Russians — under the guise of mere entertainment, as, finally, "trash": the gangster movie, the western, the historical epic. An example of how the American cinema avoids explicitly articulating even the most obvious historical parallel can be found in Coppola's movie *The Conversation* where any audiences expecting direct references to Watergate would have been disappointed. This is part of "classical" film-making's reluctance to go in for satire and, even more, for caricature (there are exceptions of course). As a consequence, the disguise which social comment in the American cinema is forced to adopt ensures that the most subtle and interesting internal critiques of American society are to be found not only in movies with specifically historical subjects (biopics, costume dramas, romances etc.) where the already known facts of the case tend to encourage traditional and conformist interpretations (also the result of simply more money being spent on these films), but equally in such "minor" genres as the B western or women's melodrama of the 50's in which social comment insinuates itself in terms of style rather than subject matter. (see "Tales of Sound and Fury" in Monogram no 4, Melodrama issue). Style as intelligence: the rigour of mise-en-scene in the films of Sirk and Ray standing as a kind of guarantee of *their* historical and political awareness (making one examine with all the greater interest the new, elliptical, fragmentary mode of narrative establishing itself as the modern Hollywood vernacular; see for example some of the films of Altman, Coppola, Hellman, and Jack Nicholson discussed later).

This is not to imply that the American film industry does not have its ear extremely close to the ground when it comes to sounding out contemporary issues: too close sometimes, as in its disastrous courting of student radicalism



The city as stage: The End of St Petersburg

in the late 60's. Yet to take another example, the rise of the gangster film very early in the 30's demonstrates the remarkably short time lag between the historical events themselves and their re-enactment in a suitable fictional incarnation. (As is well known, at much the same time as this, Warner Brothers were producing a series of progressive, documentary-style feature films protesting against some of the more crying social abuses of the period.) It remains true, nonetheless, that in the majority of cases "straight" history is too exacting a discipline for Hollywood. The attempt to find an immediate translation of the contradictions of American society into filmic material tends to rather timidly cut the moral concerns. This would be the definition of a certain liberal cinema, if it hadn't already been provided under the heading "strained seriousness" in Andrew Sarris's excellent directory. The "problem movie" is of course itself already a genre, and as such is already filtering and colouring and disguising contemporary history as much as any of the other recognised Hollywood conventions. Only here the ideological message is perhaps too naked for comfort, rather like the current spate of television serials about police detectives *(Kojak, Madigan, Columbo* etc.) where, as their names imply, the one ideological constant throughout the differing weekly episodes remains a kind of thinly-veiled ethnic liberalism.

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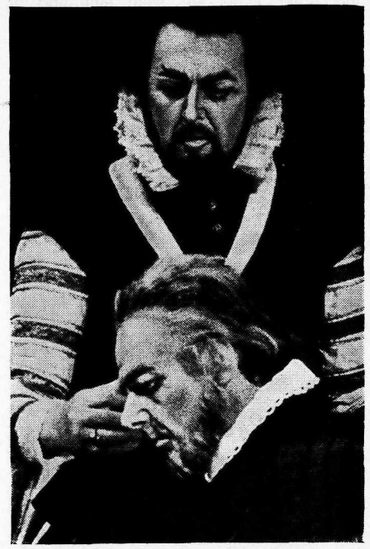
Where montage emerges in serious film criticism as the considered aesthetic criterion, it is usually accompanied by a preference for a marked stylization, often veering towards abstraction. It is interesting to pick up the negative effects of this: behind most writings which favour montage there emerges clearly what can best be described as an *hostility to realism.* The film-writer who is intellectually on his guard is always wary of being, as he thinks, "seduced by spectacle". Against the expenditure and skill which Hollywood lavishes on producing an immaculate verisimilitude — to the extent of building whole towns, utilizing real machinery etc — the characteristic stance of a certain criticism is that it will *refuse to be impressed.* The suspicion of large-scale spectacle, which amounted in many cases to asking whether cinema can be "serious" or not, is very like the literary reception given to opera in the nineteenth century. The tendency of French and Italian opera to convert political issues into sexual intrigue (since political censorship was more hostile than the other kind), matched in its own way by the cinema's predominant *violence* and *eroticism,* is taken to task in either case for distorting the real causes of events. But like opera, the effectiveness of cinematic spectacle rests very little upon the literary qualities of the text (the notorious incompetence of some of Verdi's librettists matched only by the excesses of Hollywood screenwriting departments), establishing in either case the paramount critical enquiry as one of *performance.* The quality of film and opera resides chiefly in adequate realisation rather than in adequate conception. The experience of watching a movie, never sufficiently taken account of by film criticism (so that an audience-oriented aesthetics would have to concern itself with the *mechanics* of the viewing situation) finds its equivalent in the importance placed by opera on the "actual night", a stress on the singer's expressiveness as much as on the intrinsic quality of the music, for which Wagner's writings *(The Artwork of the Future* (1849), *Opera and Drama* (1850-51)) might provide a kind of systematic framework. In fact German opera rather than French or Italian gives us rather better instances of the debate. There have been a variety of defences of the spectacular non-literary elements of opera in this tradition: and a stress on the legitimate *projection of feeling* against charges of "sensationalism" can be traced in the form of a dialogue between composer and librettist from the writings of E.T.A. Hoffman in the nineteenth century to an early 20th century opera like Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* surfacing temporarily in Brecht's Messingkauf Dialogues, to find its uneasy resolution in critics like Eric Bentley and Joseph Kerman, where the crucial distinctions are couched once more in terms of an inability to make up their minds about Wagner and Strauss.

This is simply to recognize that there is an all-important affective or emotional element — what the linguist Roman Jakobson names its *phatic aspect* — attached to performance, which concentration on text alone is unable to elucidate. (This incidentally is why thematic criticism involving itself with, say, the movies of Samuel Fuller or Nicholas Ray is so unsatisfactory, since what is really important in terms of their vigour, economy and style always remains unspoken, even unreachable.) The emotional charge of opera — at its lowest sheer noise, at its highest the extraordinary wall of combined music and human voice in Wagner — translated into the "expressive" mise-en-scene of early silent cinema as lighting, gesture, musical accompaniment,

The baroque: Visconti's Senso



Operatic confrontations: Philip II (Clifford Grant) and Posa (Benjamin Luxow) in Verdi's Don Carlos

could stand as the very definition of melo-drama (see Monogram no. 4), and thus provide an explicit conceptual link between the two media. It would be tempting, while avoiding the obvious trap of setting up some evolutionary teleology of forms in the manner of the young Lukacs, to see the degree an art-form requires this phatic component as changing from generation to generation. One could cite examples from the nineteenth century — celebrated letters from Schiller to Goethe, poems by Goethe himself (see the marvellous elegy "Euphrosyne" addressed to the Weimar actress Christiane Neumann), early writings on tragedy of Nietzsche etc etc — as privileged instances where in the face of the usual literary prejudices opera, or something like it, is seen as both more arresting and more forceful than contemporary drama, just as opera in turn finds itself precariously placed in the 20th century, not yet ready to give way before the furious onslaught of cinema. If the tendency to *turn away from the world* which one finds in German opera, at any event in Wagner, has as a consequence little to say about history, the portrayal of historical events in the cinema inherits opera's emotional intensity in the emphasis it has always placed on *violence, gesture* and *spectacle.* One might even speak of these as being the formal qualifications for history ever being successfully put over on the screen.

If the comparison between the respective critical receptions given to opera and cinema has any value — it is perhaps only very limited — it is to show that the same uncertainty about how seriously to take either genre drives one from considering their subject matter to a quite abstract consideration of their form. Translated into its formal equivalent, then, the phatic or emotional element in either genre is perhaps best rendered as "rhythm." This of course is extremely difficult to talk about, as by definition it can only be felt rather than pointed to (hence the awkwardness it offers a *semiology of film* like that of Metz since it precisely cannot be coded.) It is rhythm that provides the most salient difference between the cinema and stage, at any event, operating a kind of retrospective critique of the latter, to the extent that any stage performance of a play *not* accompanied by musical punctation and rapid shifts of scene now seems unbelievably static: — a state of affairs actually put to rather good use by playwrights like Becket and Pinter. But it also differentiates cinema strongly from opera. The requirements of aria and ensemble singing ensure that history on the operatic stage unfolds by a kind of leisurely intensity, in which victim and oppressor, locked in a musical web, partake of the same lyrical expansiveness (think of the "inquisition" scenes in *Fidelio* and *Don Carlos).* There is always something *stately* in operatic anguish which has everything to do with the enforced stillness of the combatants as they deliver themselves of their dramatically opposite points of view, into which harmony is yet so strongly interwoven. (Doubtless the ideological residuum of this — Italian opera providing the most obvious example — is a bourgeois notion of dignity and self-expression, rather suitable for those national parliaments which nineteenth century liberal thinking was so anxious to constitute, so that in a certain perspective Italian opera can be seen as nothing so much as practice in the art of "debate"). In contrast to opera the rapid changes of pace caused by the pervasive cutting in classical editing procedures used by the cinema, coupled by the more egregious use of music as simply punctation and mobility of camerawork which enables the director to practise extreme economy of exposition — in a word the whole *concision* of classical Hollywood film-making — all combine to suggest that rhythm in the American cinema is not, as cliché suggests, one of smoothness and blandness whereby the audience is encouraged to "mistake" the represented spectacle for something called "real life" (that whole mythology of the development of film technique which *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cinethique* have been busy palming off as history). On the contrary, nothing is easier to demonstrate than the fact that rhythm in the American cinema is an achievement of pace, of punctation, of economy, of shock; and as such may be said to mirror the recurrent definition of dramatic action in so many American movies — the films of Lang, Ray, Fuller etc — as *violence* and *quest.*

With quest converted into spectacle, one has only to cite the genre of war-film or western to see history in the American cinema as a veritable canvas of violence. Is it surprising how "unideological" this view of history turns out to be? The emphasis on individual drama within the wider spectrum of events keeps the narrative extraordinarily hermetic. The unwillingness — except in a handful of cases, Ford perhaps the most obvious — to suggest outside causes for the actions which take place has the practical effect of de-historicising any episodes that are based on fact. (Peter Lloyd's commentary on *They Died With Their Boots On* in the much maligned Raoul Walsh handbook brilliantly demonstrates this process: he only omitted to contrast it with Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man,* also about the events leading up to Custer's last stand, to show how the latter differs from Walsh's characteristically apolitical stance towards history, and to speculate on some possible reasons behind this).

The complete dependence on narrative impetus to carry the story, rather than relying on our previous historical knowledge and expectations, is one of the definitions, as Peter Lloyd points out, of the American cinema's classicism. Unlike the Brechtian or Marxist conception of epic theatre which is interested in defining

Art and violence: Laurent Tertzieff and Sandra Milo in Vanina Vanini

the broad general conditions of history — history as class-struggle, or the struggle of economic interests — Hollywood is characteristically concerned only with the existential predicament of the individuals involved. One notices time and again the amazingly claustrophobic atmosphere of the best war films: conditions fulfilled by the shallow snow-filled trenches of Wellman's *Battleground,* the enclosed pagoda set of Fuller's *Steel Helmet,* or the bunker surrounded by mine fields in Siegel's *Hell is for Heroes.* (The *dates* of war movies are interesting: there is only an arbitrary correspondence between the period in which they were produced and the period in which the events they are depicting were supposed to take place. Good war films are produced equally during the war, and at five or at ten or at twenty year intervals afterwards, which suggests that they should not so much be seen as historical documents intent on recording a particular episode, as in fact quite abstract and metaphorical discourses: which is only another definition of their being a genre.)

In sum, the American cinema has never pretended to analyse the political events that lead up to a given confrontation. What it does and has always done unsurpassably is to give us the feeling of actually experiencing the conditions in question: that is, as often as not, the feeling of facing death, the sense of living in extreme situations in a way that no other art form can come near to matching. This is of course an unhistorical aesthetic, presenting the subject matter in terms of an extreme contingency, that is to say, *of living in the present tense.* Its rallying cry is not the didactic "This is how it happened", but Ford's more sardonic testimony to human behaviour under extremes: "This really happened!" *(The Battle of Midway).* The intensity with which, mirroring the cinema's attributes of shock and violence, the camera relentlessly focusses upon men under duress in the best American war films (besides those already mentioned one could perhaps add *Merrill's Marauders* (Samuel Fuller, 1961), *Air Force* (1943, Howard Hawks), *Objective Burma* (Raoul Walsh, 1945) and one or two others), precludes a concomitant investigation into the political causes behind the actions depicted — causes which must be taken as read. In view of the force of what is offered, it seems pointless to ask whether this is "enough". All the same, it is perhaps only self-defence to acknowledge that the moral content of this kind of spectacle is usually mistaken for sensationalism.

The trenches in Pabst's Westfront 1918

As it happens, this is not a difficult charge to refute. The narrow hermetic quality of most of the films just mentioned encourages a formal, abstract, metaphorical use of mise-en-scene which manages to place the depicted events in their own moral context, so that the discourse does not simply show, but also comments. Mise-en-scene becomes a function of *defining limits,* that is to say of constructing a system within which meaning becomes possible. Thus, far from being merely sensational, war movies are capable of using symbolism as a distancing device in a very economical way indeed, without falling into the vague generalising humanism which is Allegory. But one would want to stress the importance of a *realistic depiction of events* over and above all this. A film like Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (since it has been mentioned previously) has in fact very little use for symbolism. There is no nexus of objects to attach that symbolism to. The mobile quality of the camera-work precludes the static, framing point of reference so necessary for mise-en-scene. There is almost no characterization, no central figures in whom the audience can identify a moral focus. Instead, entire reels of the film are taken up with the camera roving backwards and forwards over dark muddy trenches, while shells explode haphazardly sending up showers of mud and scree. There is practically no human movement visible; just occasionally infantrymen of one or the other sides are seen emerging or retreating into the gloom. The resolution is as schematic as the opening shots and offers very little fundamental coherence. The film is altogether bleak, stark and extraordinary, surprisingly reticent of any explicit message about brotherhood or pacifism (unlike some of his subsequent movies, eg the more celebrated *Kameradschaft).* Such Expressionist elements as there are are limited to the final reel and consist of the hero's losing his mind through shell-shock ("hysteria" being a characteristic trope of Expressionism), and the accusatory end title which implies that everything might happen like this again. How is the film so effective? How is it so intelligent? The primitive sound recording equipment which keeps dialogue to a minimum rescues the movie from the literary verbosity of contemporary Expressionist playwrights like Toller and Hasenklaver (not to mention the more traditional ineptitudes of an English equivalent like R.C. Sherriff's "Journey's End"). But even more than this there is the question of a basic realism, fundamentally unamenable to the theatre. The muffled roar of exploding shells on the sound track is not only the definitive reply to so much literary soul-searching — a kind of disdainful retort to the verbal over-kill of stage-productions. It is also the very drama of realism. Taken together with the authenticity of the battle sequences it suggests how vital it is in the cinema to get the detailing right, or in other words to *render* the represented spectacle. By making it as concrete and accurate as possible — that is, for a start, by *taking it out of doors* — the whole literary tendency of staged drama to sink into some abstract thesis (such as "The Theatre of the Absurd") is triumphantly avoided.

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Pabst's film can be taken because it it stands schematically at a crucial conjuncture, not so much in his own career (although he had dabbled in Expressionism in past movies) as in that of the cinema as a whole, whereby with the coming of sound one finds the dominance of film as a *non-abstract art-form* became finally accepted. If the talents of avant-garde artists and designers continued to be used, it was in the service of a cinema anchored — unlike modern painting, to give the obvious contrast — to an ethic of realism. The question of what at this period cinema appropriated from literary and artistic models of the avant-garde (at its most schematic, the question of what America took from Europe) is extremely interesting and deserves fuller study in terms of a kind of clandestine history of the artform which would uncover some of the problems ignored in the published histories. Lotte Eisner's book, now many years old, about the influence of Expressionism in the cinema contents itself with pointing to the better known instances and limiting herself to a European context, whereas it is obvious that even before the influx of craftsmen from the German cinema into America in the early thirties, Hollywood was permeated at all sorts of different levels by a kind of heightened,

Defeat on the battlefield ... Senso

expressive realism. That this stopped short of being "avant-garde", of slipping over into the abstract, finds a very schematic testimony in the career of Fritz Lang, where the contrast between *Metropolis* (1926, Germany) and his first American film *Fury* only ten years later couldn't be more illustrative. The development of cinema at this period can best be seen as a pragmatic taking from Expressionism all that it finds useful, while at the same time turning to good-natured ridicule the more pretentious aspects of its aesthetic doctrine. (Films as different as *Twentieth Century* and *The Band Wagon* use this process as a theme for some very fine comedy). What remained constant was the commitment to a certain inextinguishable element of verisimilitude which these notes have been attempting to comment on.

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"History in the cinema": Bazin's essential naivety, which one can see in retrospect is the consequence of a theological outlook, was to read into American cinematic realism (which he did so much to define) a transcendant view of history whereby meaning simply gives itself up, like those epiphanies which infuse the banal contingency of everyday existence with heightened significance.

In the meantime, it left the way open for the defenders of montage to delegate to themselves the privilege of championing a rather more materialist view of history. According to Bazin's prescription, — elaborated in his analyses of Renoir, Rossellini, Welles etc — cinema functioned by simply waiting round passively for meaning to emerge — that is to say, by setting up the conditions where it *could* emerge, like a photographer waiting to get a snap of a rare animal. In contrast to this, the champions of montage thought they had little difficulty in demonstrating that it is the cinema itself in its multiplicity of codes which *makes* meaning. Debate like this in as often as not simply the rationalization of temperamental preferences (first finding the kind of film one likes and then constructing a theory round it,) but it seems to me in this case that both sides were wrong. The defenders of montage, for arrogating to themselves one of those mythical *correct ways* of depicting history (a kind of aesthetic equivalent to a crude form of marxism); and the defenders of neo-realism, (quite apart from their belief in the divine provenance of history which must presumably remain untested), who are equally at fault for insisting on the demonstrably false equivalence of cinema, in its spatial, temporal incarnation, to "real life".

The purpose of saying this is to re-stress the principle that though the cinema owes everything that is worthwhile in it to its emancipation from the theater, its formal basis is still over and above everything intensely *theatrical.* The critical distance which, insinuated into the discourse, this theatrical element provides should serve to prevent even the most forlorn "Bazinian" from mistaking the cinema for reality. Nothing is easier to demonstrate in even the most classical examples of mise-en-scene that a high premium is placed on realism only to re-introduce, side by side as it were an extremely abstract, even melodramatic notion of theatricality: "I am interested in this theatrical aspect. Already in *Le Petit Soldat,* the more I was trying to discover the concrete, the closer I came to the theatre" (Godard). As has been suggested, it is the very consequence of rhythm (functioning as shock) to introduce into the most hackneyed scenario an element of rupture. The foreshortening of time scales in the surge of narrative mimics the function of editing as *cutting* and *distortion.* In addition, the enclosed action of Hollywood drama, and the rigour with which mise-en-scene — lighting, camera angles, close-ups, etc. — is deployed has a way of making the discourse metaphorical, stylized, schematic. (Think of some of the war films mentioned: the perpetual night-time sequences in Donald Siegel's *Hell is for Heroes* becomes, by an imperceptible metaphorical gradation, the literal Hell of the title; similarly, the blinding white snow in Wellman's *Battleground* which surrounds the stranded American platoon functions as a kind of threatening shroud, hovering around the oblong trenches which the G.I.'s have dug themselves into — which in turn are registered by the camera angles they are shot from as the potential graves of the platoon.) For many people the American cinema only comes alive with the realisation that its signs are prodigiously formal and symmetrical — whether it is *Johnny Guitar* or *Strangers on a Train* which provides the revelation. In anything as tightly compact as Hollywood drama — the result of paring everything that impedes the narrative flow — the least contrast is going to acquire a formal significance, even the contrast between indoor and outdoor sequences. One could speak of a highly abstract dialectic which is set in motion by the difference between "lit", studio-bound interiors — poised, measured, perhaps somewhat stilted — and the "realistic" outside action sequences which function on a totally different level (a footnote here for the auteur debate: the importance of the *2nd unit director).* War films again give us some of the best examples of this. To stay with the films already mentioned: the closing reels of Fuller's *Steel Helmet* offer an extraordinarily schematic contrast between the still, hieratic, densely metaphorical set of the Pagoda (a refuge where the American soldiers are holding out), used by Fuller with great skill to suggest a complex moral universe, and the violent, contingent, rapidly cutting shots of the anonymous Korean troops as they begin to attack. Hawks goes further in *Air Force* (1943) to include large sections of newsreel footage for shots of American aircraft bombarding the Japanese fleet; these are formally in distinct contrast to the hermetic, studio-constructed cockpit sequences which have taken up the rest of the film. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* for all the "realism" of its front-line sequences contains an episode in which one of the characters returns home to find his wife has been unfaithful to him, so awkwardly performed, with such melodramatic solemnity as to make the contrast seem in retrospect almost a desired effect — as if a director like Straub had set it up purely in terms of a formal experiment. (See, for instance, Straub's use of similar scenes in *The Bridegroom, The Actress and the Pimp.* Pabst's movie is already adapted from a novel, which is what is behind those stilted, romanesque stage conventions for the interior sequences).

Just as enclosed indoor episodes photographed in a certain way acquire a metaphorical resonance, so practically do exteriors. Although in the anonymous

outdoors there may appear to be no specific objects to pin these extra layers of meaning onto, the fact remains that landscape is already metaphorical. We bring to its contemplation the knowledge of a whole history of ways it has previously been represented, in myth and in painting, a coherent iconography which the development of cinema was itself to do much to enrich. Thus when American cinema for the first time for hundreds of years in staged spectacle took history out of doors, it was into a landscape that already vibrated with connotations and myths. In fact such is the force in Western culture of a sense of lost paradise, that any depiction of landscape (that is, where it is not simply the background for events that are otherwise unrelated) is almost bound to carry with it as a residual ideological element the sense of loss. As landscape becomes myth, history becomes nostalgia. Thus, where landscape is the "subject" of the movie in question, as it is in the bold and, as it were, overdetermined canvases presented in a genre like the Western, the view of history that can be extracted will tend to be conservative: lurid — but conservative, like the flaming orange sunsets of Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. For all the physical distance covered by the different landscapes of Ford, Boetticher or Mann, they operate in fact as closed systems, a self enclosed "moral universe" which can take an oblique and ambiguous stance towards the development of history. Myth, like nostalgia, is supposed to be timeless. So are the rigid, formalised conventions of the Western's endless *pageant of violence*.

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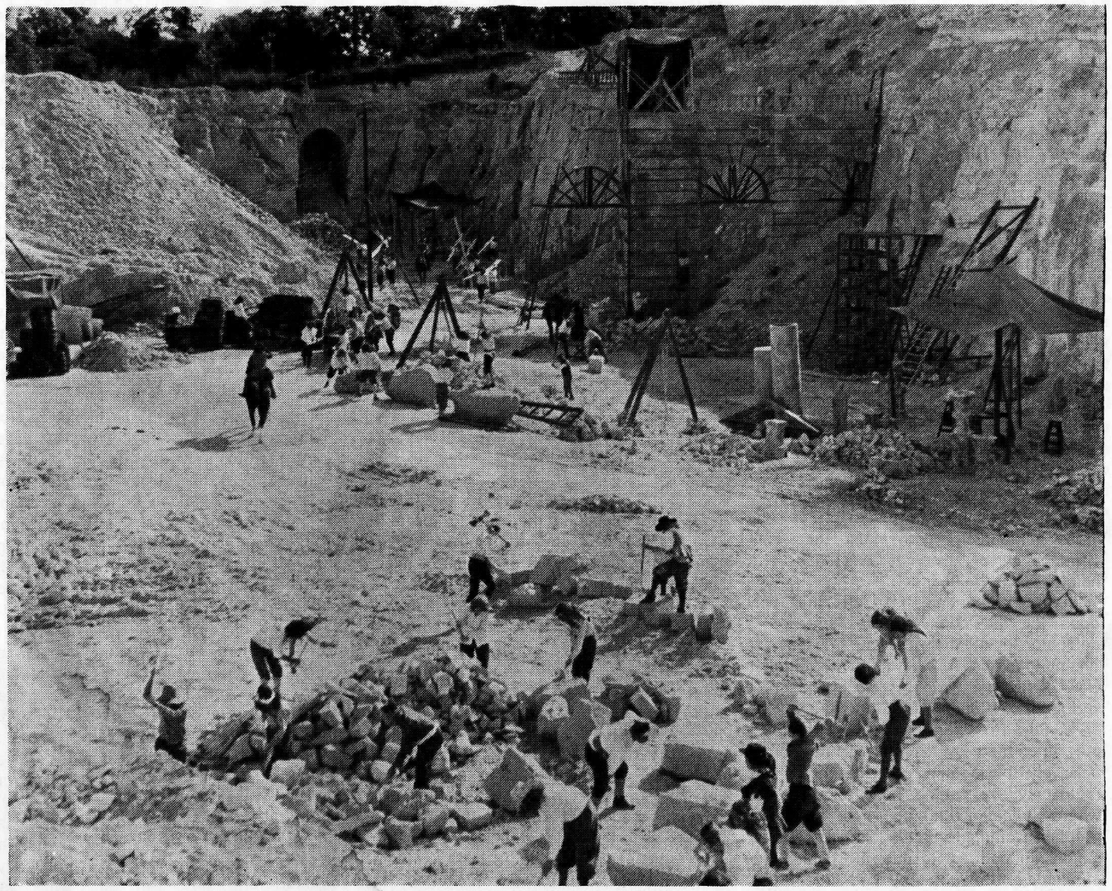
Pageant: *spectacle*. Whether the emphasis in a given movie is on history or myth (the difference, say, between a Ford and a Hawks western), the irreducible element of spectacle serves to remind us that its "message" will be formalised as *gesture*. The so-called "stupidity" of cinema (to its detractors) comes from failing to recognise the essentially visual character of mise-en-scene, and seeking to re-instate instead the hegemony of plot (guarantee of literary accountability). Spectacle in this context is the liberation from tragedy — the tragedy whose ideological function Nietzsche originally criticised as "emetic". (Note: this is not the same thing as saying that the cinema has no room for pathos. It is exactly that purged of the metaphysical elements of the western tradition of drama, the cinema recreates the conditions in which pathos can once more operate.) Spectacle here becomes a kind of *asceticism* — as it is is in the best westerns — so that a salient comparison might be between Dreyer's rigorously silent screen dramatisation and Shaw's windy, verbiose stage version of the trial of St Joan (1928 and 1924 respectively). Austerity in spectacle sounds a paradoxical attribute, and it may come as a surprise to anyone who has read these notes so far as an argument for the intrinsically flamboyant quality of the medium. Yet it is an essential aspect of the aesthetic intelligence of such directors of historical spectacle as Mizoguchi and Rossellini that the hyperbolic *expansiveness of gesture* on the part of their actors is held within a practise of mise-en-scene whose suave immaculacy is a conduct of reticence. It is the very patience of their tracking shots! — or the care with which the succeeding episodes of the drama are made to unfold as so many "cameos". It is the intelligence of musical punctuation, no less than the assured placing of fades and dissolves. (In a word, there is nothing intrinsically stupid about spectacle: its success or failure depends as it has always done on those qualities of taste and judgement which are in the last resort beyond the reach of detailed critical analysis. Thus it is an intuition about form rather than content that separates *Senso* from *The Night Porter,* or the films of Makavejev from the films of Ken Russell.) European and Japanese cinema's staging of history, then, shares this interesting mixture of

The lens of history... construction of Versailles from Rossellini's Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV



realism and formality. The combination of a large scale realistic canvas — meticulously shot battle scenes, deployment of a large army of extras and so on — with a poised, ordered mise-en-scene to advance the narrative can produce an aesthetic, gestural view of history, the sense of *history as stage* (where the final scenes culminate on the scaffold!) particularly suitable for dealing with periods which have a strong, often factitious sense of pageant. Thus operatic view of history has a long tradition in the Italian cinema, most vividly exemplified perhaps by movies like Visconti's *Senso* or Rossellini's two dramatisations of 19th century history *Viva L'Italia* and *Vanina Vanini*. In all these films history is mediated through violent and melodramatic passion (English title of Rossellini's film: *The Betrayer)* — specifically, in two of the three movies mentioned, the moral conflict felt by a young man caught up in the events of a national uprising who is loved at the same time by an older woman (Alida Valli and Farley Granger in Visconti's film, Sandra Milo and Laurent Tertzieff in Rossellini's). The distinction of *Vanina,* to make this clear, lies in the way the scenes of heightened drama (the murder of the informer, the Countess Vitelleschi's confrontation with the young confessor, the farewell scenes in the castle, the execution of Pierre) are held up within a highly stylized, ordered framework, a kind of aesthetic *chastity* which functions to produce this curious and compelling mixture of distance on the one hand and fierce emotional vibrancy on the other. These are "operatic" movies and their relation to spectacle would be in terms of some of the distinctions already discussed: they are indeed "flamboyant" and "theatrical", and stand at the opposite end of the scale from the later Rossellini where these attributes are frozen into a kind of restrained ascesis. It is here that the cinema's capacity for realism becomes once more so interesting. At the extreme level of coolness one finds in such films as *Le Prise de Pouvoir de Louis Quatorze* the camera resumes among other things its objective or documentary function, and the spectacle of history in the *cinema* becomes the triumph of the camera's versatile and patient eye for detail. The ideological gloss on this reading is a humanist one in so far as Rossellini's preoccupations have to do with a fascination with technology, so that in a certain sense narrative itself is subordinated to the principal task of celebrating the camera's unique privilege: ie the ability to patiently reconstruct in minute detail the very texture of everyday life in past epochs. In so far as the development of technology is at all tied to the establishment of political power (the equation neatly presented in the shots of the construction of Versailles) Rossellini's interests are in mainstream history, but the same observations apply to movies whose subject matter places them on the margins of civilization and whose drama might be read — as in *L'Enfant Sauvage,* or *Hell in the Pacific* or *Savage Innocents* — as the forcible immersion of an anachronistic hero into history. It is exactly on the borders of civilization where technology encompasses the need for survival, and in the context of isolation, (the Pacific islands, the Arctic snows), that the cinema most exerts its curious and literal charm: *how* does one transport cannon and supplies on an expedition into the interior of Peru, or construct a raft large enough and stable enough to take horses? (Herzog's *Aguirre).* What are the methods of keeping warm in an igloo? (Nicholas Ray). What sort of domestic arrangements does one rig up to get an adequate supply of rainwater and how does one ensure they're best defended? (Boorman). The level of unobtrusive despatch at which these reconstructions take place — and it encompasses equally the more overtly "operatic" movies one's been considering: eg and purely at random, the sequences in the granary in Visconti's *Senso* which effortlessly accomplish both their narrative function and serve to establish (i.e. render concrete) the economic basis for the social position of the movie's protagonists — is the proof of the cinema's ability to sketch the process and movement of colonisation in its widest sense, that is, the physical and intellectual appropriation of unknown territory; it situates itself happily *on the frontier* (the western the most resilient of all genres!), as a kind of metaphor for the technical challenge of filmmaking itself, the physical objects that have to be overcome (directors as craftsmen: Hawks (engineer), Lang and Ray (architects) etc etc.) The accuracy accomplished through this is *unobtrusive* in a way that is finally impossible on the stage where, for example (from the British theatre) in the "naturalism" of standard Royal Court productions, the portrayal of *work* in any form inevitably becomes allegorical. The construction of the marquee in David Storey's "The Contractor" "wastes" the realism of Lindsay Anderson's direction since the nearer the tent gets to completion (and it is significant that this process covers the entire trajectory of the plot) the closer it comes to resembling the symbolical tower dreamed up by Ibsen's "Masterbuilder". Only in the cinema do the processes of production escape the insidious allegorization which they seem doomed to bear in literary discourse (including the theatre.) The scenes of Bach composing in Straub's *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach,* or the scenes in the suburban laundry in Renoir's *Crime of M. Lange,* or the scenes in which Itard (Truffaut) tries to teach the boy to talk in *L'Enfant Sauvage* are the speculated fulfilment of a certain utopian dream where work and leisure are presented at one and the same time *in the concrete* in a certain historical incarnation.

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The distinctions which have been made up to now have usually been designed to bring out the difference between cinema's approach to the staging of historical pageant and that of other art forms (eg opera, theatre). But there is a final distinction within the cinema itself which these notes would be incomplete without mentioning. The three examples given at the end of the last section all come from the European cinema, but they are unusual in doing so. With one or two exceptions, — notably, of course, Rossellini — European "art" cinema is not a cinema of history. Its overwhelming concentration, if one were to attempt to pin down its ideology, has been on "human problems", subsumed in a kind of universalist category: Olmi, Jancso, Bergman, Truffaut and more recently Tanner and Goretta operate a cinema of close-up which aims to catch the minute details of human behaviour at their most natural, translating them into categories of pathos or tenderness or pain (see the review of Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* in Monogram no. 5). Only recently has the concept of spectacle in European cinema become firmly directed towards history, so that for instance the "mythological" bias of Italian cinema during the 60's (Pasolini's allegorical theorems and pigsties, Fellini's monstrous Satyricon) has now become harnessed to a much more explicitly historical investigation of fascism. (Not so much an investigation perhaps, more a perspective — as *Roma* gives way to *Amarcord* and the Italian cinema is swamped with directors returning to their regional roots to chronicle the history of the land and the peasantry.)

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All this has perhaps something of a naivety about it. There is something of a rush to get in on the job; it is as if for the first time after years of "humanist" enterprise history in Europe is being *discovered* as a potential topic for the medium of film. Spectacle is here the spectacle of flesh and "decadence", as following the course set by market demands the chronicling of fascism coincides with the increasingly explicit sexual discourse now allowed in the cinema. Fascism and fashion: with the exception of a forceful and original movie like Makavejev's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism,* these films fall victim to what one can only call a *B.B.C. approach* to historical drama which has the costume department and the decor scrupulously correct, but whose repertoire of narrative ruses and formal devices to put the story over are disarmingly derivative: the operatic panache of cinematic spectacle commented on earlier on in these notes becomes too literally a descent into overblown grand opera *(The Damned; The Night Porter);* while the cinema's ability to manipulate eroticism *conceptually,* degenerates into the weight of pathos placed on a series of supiciously blond and beautiful blue-eyed heroines (whose "jewishness" might be their least obvious attribute: consider Charlotte Rampling in *The Night Porter;* Dominique Sanda in *The Conformist* and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis,* Aurore Clément in *Lacombe Lucien,* or even poor Marisa Berenson in *Cabaret*. Obviously in all these cases what is important is their *aristocratic* vulnerability.)

By contrast the American cinema has always been the popular art form which par excellence constructs past and present

Elliott Gould and George Segal in California Split

simultaneously; which writes itself historically, as Lukacs claimed the novel was able to do in the time of Balzac. It is an art form of the present tense. Hollywood's formal dynamics — its vigour, concision and pace — have been so many ways in which melodrama from its beginnings has externalised (made public, made articulate) the energy and anger of its beleaguered and proletarian heroes (Cagney, Bogart, Douglas, McQueen), transforming that formal drive into social comment. The function of narrative in American pictures is exactly to translate the inner pulsion of these men into formal and graspable signs by giving it a goal. Thus it provides so to speak the framework in which the asceticism of *gesture* can be substituted for that abundance of *speech* now reified beyond salvaging into literary and class contingencies. The "discovery" over the last ten years of Sirk and Fuller and other directors like them has been largely the discovery of this *secret discourse* which although not exactly subversive (the word has too mandarin and cultivated a connotation: Bunuel is "subversive") is nevertheless the clue on the level of form to these movies' ambiguous message. They are disquieting where they *should* be conformist, intransigent where they *seem* to offer the easy option (hence, for all the earnest posturing that follows from too literal an application, psychoanalysis — as in the famous Cahiers dissection of *Young Mr Lincoln* — is in fact a good metaphor for their general method of interpretation).

But now the American cinema is becoming retrospective, and restaging recent past social history as avidly as the Europeans. The loss of confidence in the way things are going at present politically, is a signal to re-examine the roots of the disaster in the past; or, if not to examine them, to forget them in the revisionist history which forgives everything by seeing it through the eyes of a child. The numb, dull stubborn inarticulacy of the heroes of the 50's, Brando and James Dean, whose revolt was "fashioned" and given direction inside a tight and coherent notion of mise-en-scene, structured, symbolic, translatable, has become a kind of passive and ironic aimlessness, symbolised by the hysterical five minute burst of laughter of a Randy McQuaid in *The Last Detail,* or else the kind of stoned, endlessly inarticulate verbalising one gets in Robert Altman's movies, where the fragmentation of American society is seen not so much in terms of a hero, but, literally, in the promiscuous chance encounters of the crowd: (the "underworld" no longer inhabited exclusively by gangsters, but by a whole assorted fauna of thieves, whores, hippies, religious freaks, ordinary people, everyone who doesn't hold a 9 to 5 job. The beautiful, wry crowd scenes of Altman, Peckinpah, Mazursky, Nicholson...) The "retrospective" in American cinema excuses the mess of the present by invoking a duped innocence of the past, like the inarticulate children in Terrence Malick's *Badlands* who give themselves up so artlessly, figuring that their reign of terror may as well end when they run out of petrol. The hesitant, aleatory, improvised acting one finds here and in so many recent American films is the stylistic equivalent of a difference about responsibility which from Shakespeare to Chekhov has always focussed itself on the question of age, and which here can be symbolised by nothing so much as Jack Nicholson's angst-ridden mumblings at the beginning of *The King of Marvin Gardens.* With the middle aged against the young (as in Malick's film) or in strange complicity with them (other films by or connected with Jack Nicholson like *Easy Rider* and *Drive He Said,* or Sam Peckinpah, notably in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid,* or the John Huston of *Fat City),* the spectacle of history is presented for all its dangerousness as a calculated "spree", as a kind of dumb and violent odyssey which never gets anywhere. A sardonic view of history as "failed lives". Elsewhere it is a *night to remember* where the adolescent hero gets drunk or gets laid, a last night of innocence before the daylight of history and the subsequent unsettling events of the last twenty years force themselves on his consciousness (see for example the sense of bewildered regret that marks *The Last Detail, American Graffiti, The Last Picture Show).* Commemorated by the music of the period, an endless chorus of folk and rock of the 50's and 60's, the hero aims to lose himself in a kind of cencentrated zeal, like the shuddering shoulders of James Taylor as he forces his car through the gears in the closing shots of *Two Lane Blacktop,* while the screen blisters into oblivion (it is the definition of epiphany to be timeless). The events of the 60's (preeminently the history of America's increasing involvement in Vietnam), which signalled for someone like Godard the necessary withdrawal of support and endorsement of the American cinema, offered no such easy solution to the indigenous group of American directors just beginning to make a career for themselves, who on the contrary were forced to go back to their adolescence, in the late 40's and 50's, as a means of exploring both the phemomenon of Hollywood, and what could be made of it now.

Well, astonishingly, and this continues to provide food for thought for the many ways in which politics can be assimilated into art, the commercial cinema — a cinema of taste, intelligence and genuine popular appeal — continues to prosper in the United States, its political message neither simplified into allegory nor agitprop, but nestling clandestinely as it has always done in an essential strength of observation — that egregious texture of realism which these notes have attempted to stress. *Drive He Said, Junior Bonner, Two Lane Blacktop, California Split, American Graffiti:* minor enough movies in their way but just for that reason representative of the amazing fertility and inventiveness which continues to be the hallmark of American pictures and their impressive assurance.

Pageants of violence: action, movement, gesture. Above all gesture. History itself preserved as the miraculous attribute of cinema. Men bathing off the edge of the ship they are building in Eisenstein's *Strike* (a moment in Russian history before industry and leisure are divorced); a woman orator berating the assembled "Amis de la Constitution" in Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (a moment in which history as speech, mime and expressiveness is still the property of the people and not of the demagoue: in other words a film about eloquence); a partisan being shot dead as he retreats through the marshes in Rossellini's *Paisa;* a confrontation of cultures in Ford's *The Searchers.* Battles, routs, victories. The cinema's external canvas; its scope, size and versatility; its disregard for literary and class stereotypes. Strange mixture of taste and vulgarity: its violence and intelligence. Cinematic *spectacle.*

Mark Le Fanu

notes on the unmotivated hero

the pathos of failure: american films in the 70's

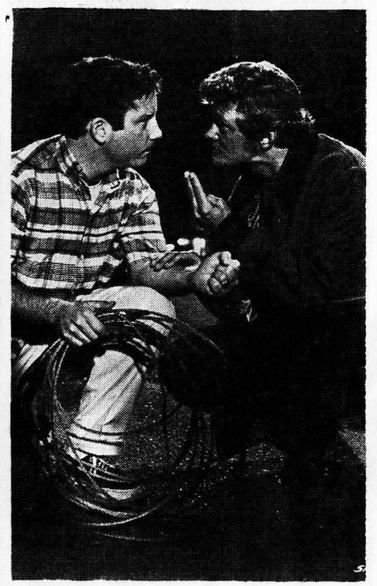
Looking at *Thieves Like Us* and remembering *They Live By Night,* wanting to compare *Jeremiah Johnson* with *Run of the Arrow,* or thinking of *The Naked Spur* when watching *Deliverance* may simply be the typical pastime of someone who has seen too many movies; nonetheless the similarities are also another reminder of how faithful the American cinema is to its basic themes. One can safely venture, for instance, that the new Hollywood of Altman, Pollack, Boorman, of Rafelson, Hellman, Spielberg or Ashby is as fond of mapping out journeys as were the films of Ray, Fuller or Anthony Mann in the 50s. And yet, it is equally evident that this motif has nowadays less of a thematic or dynamic function: journeys are no longer the same drive-and goal-oriented moral trajectories as they were. And although still serving as an oblique metaphor of the archetypal American experience, they seem to foreground themselves and assume the blander status of a narrative device, sometimes a picaresque support for individual scenes, situations and setpieces, another time the ironically admitted pretext to keep the film moving. One wonders whether *Two Lane Blacktop, Five Easy Pieces, The Last Detail, California Split* (to name but a few) will come to be seen as apt examples of a shift, no doubt historically significant, that makes the existential themes of one generation of filmmakers no more than reference points to be quoted by the next - and to be used perhaps in order to scaffold a cautious, but differently constructed architecture of film narrative. If the themes remain the same, the attitudes and thereby the forms could not be more different, and there is evidence, it seems to me, that in some of the films mentioned an aspect of experimentation is hidden, of the kind familiar only from the masters of the classical mise-en-scene and the cinematically literate European directors. What follows is an attempt to speculate in what sense even commercial American films might be considered 'experimental'.

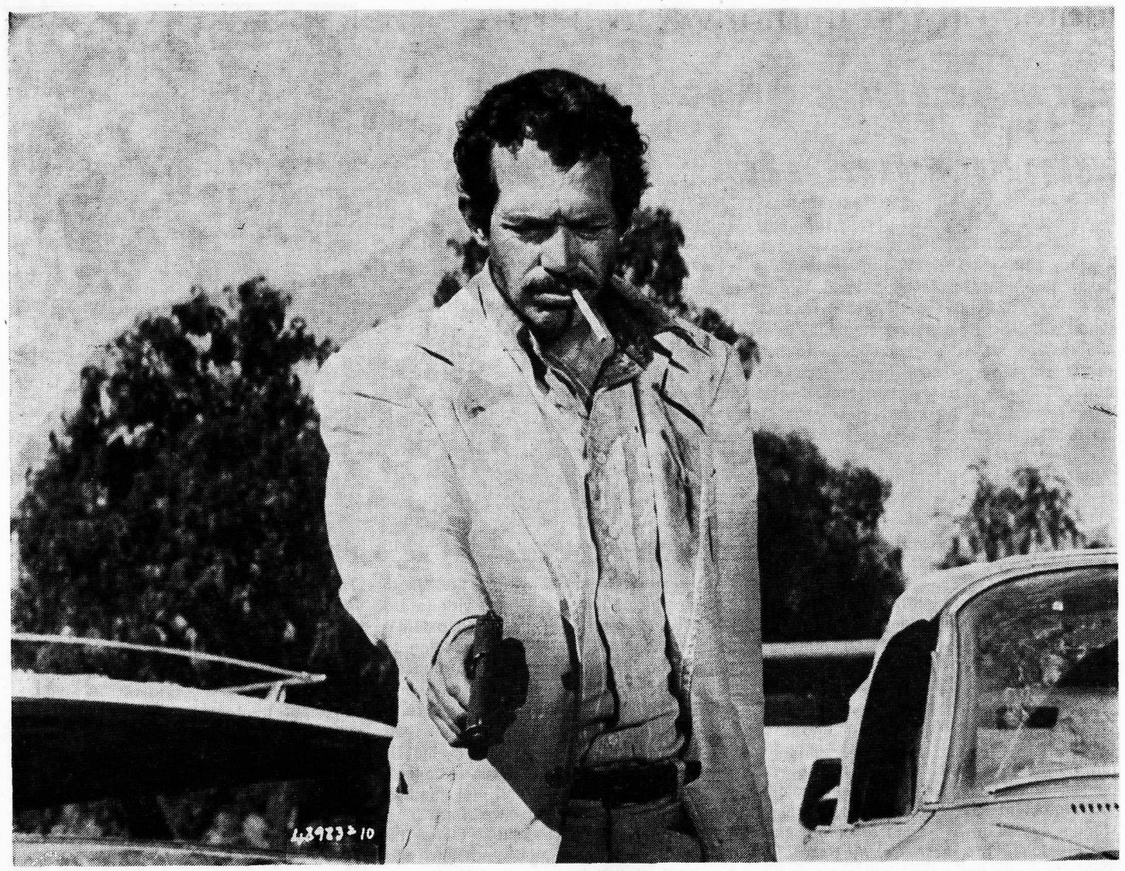
The perversity of the enterprise must be admitted from the start. Not only is my choice of films selective, the argument fastens on an element that seems excessively esoteric in the context of the American cinema of the 70s, whose virtues are its down-to-earth realism, its unostentatious detachment, while still managing to convey the customary accuracy of observation, the palpable physical presence and emotional resonance of spectacle and action. All the same, the significant feature of this new liberal cinema is that it makes an issue of the motives — or lack of them — in its heroes, and that this has implications on the narrative form and thereby on how one sees these films. The combination of the unmotivated hero and the motif of the journey, that is, the recourse to a motivation, ready-made, highly conventionalized and brought to the film from outside would appear to indicate a kind of malaise already frequently alluded to in relation to the European cinema — the fading confidence in being able to tell a story. But is it in fact the same thing as the self-conscious awareness of the status of fiction so noticeable in Chabrol or Bunuel?

The trope of innocence: Shelley Duval in Thieves Like Us

To put the problem in perspective: it will be remembered that the so-called classical narrative was essentially based on a dramaturgy of intrigue and strongly accentuated plot, which managed to transform spatial and temporal sequence into consequence, a continuum of cause and effect. The image or scene not only pointed forward and backward to what had been and what was to come, but also helped to develop a motivational logic that functioned as an implicit causality. Whether Hichcock thriller or Hawks comedy, one was secure in the knowledge that the scenes fitted into each other like cogwheels in a clockwork, and that all visual

Dawn after a night to remember... situating the present by a backward-looking glance in George Lucas's American Graffiti





A hero with no past to romanticise: Warren Oates in Bring Me The Head Of Alfredo Garcia

information was purposive, inflected towards a plenitude of significance, saturated with clues that explained motivation and character. Out of conflict, contradiction and contingency the narrative generated order, linearity, and articulated energy. Obviously, at a deeper level, such a practice implies an ideology — of progress, of forging in the shape of the plot the outlines of a cultural message. The dramaturgy on the other hand, posited heroes who were psychologically or morally motivated: they had a case to investigate, a name to clear, a woman (or man) to love, a goal to reach. Ideological critics have therefore detected in the classical cinema a fundamentally affirmative attitude to the world it depicts, a kind of a-priori optimism located in the very structure of the narrative about the usefulness of positive action. Contradictions were resolved and obstacles overcome by having them played out in dramatic-dynamic terms or by personal initiative: whatever the problem, one can *do* something about it.

Such implicit didacticism is less easy to find in those films of the 70s that pick up the motif of the journey. On the contrary, the off-hand way it is usually introduced specifically neutralizes goal-directedness and warns one not to expect an affirmation of purposes and meanings. Taking to the road comes to stand for the very quality of contingency, and a film like *Two Lane Blacktop* is symptomatic in this respect: there is only the merest shadow of an intrigue, the action provocatively avoids the interpersonal conflicts potentially inherent both in the triangular relationship and in the challenge personified by the Warren Oates characters, and finally, the film toys with goals (the race to Washington) in an almost gratuitous way. On this level, Hellman has made, and doubtless intended, an anti-action film, deliberately playing down an intrigue that might goad the spectator into involvement or a plot that could generate a psychologically motivated causality.

Hellman is not alone in this. The change I think one can detect is that the affirmative-consequential model of narrative is gradually being replaced by another, whose precise nature is yet to be determined. This is why the films I'm here interested in have a transitional status. Their liberal outlook, their unsentimental approach to American society makes them reject affirmation on the level of ideology, a rejection which has rendered problematic the dramaturgy and film-language developed within the context of an affirmative culture. But the changes have also something to do with the altered conditions of production. Television not only affected the economic structures of film-making, it also left ideologically less representative groups in the cinemas. And since independent producers and directors are now (more relentlessly than in the days when a studio could cushion even a string of failures) under pressure to adequate their films to the ideological assumptions of prospective audiences, it is not surprising to find films reflect stances of dissent typical among minority groups. Compared with the 40s and 50s, the commercial cinema has such a tenuous economic hold over its audiences that it is in practice forced to seek them out, capture them either by an intensity of emotional involvement that is unavailable to television — a dramaturgy of suspense, spectacle and violence — or by anticipation of favoured emotional anti-stances, such as cynicism, or the detached cool of a certain *machismo*. Cop-thrillers or disaster-movies cater for the first type, road-movies with rebels as heroes are a useful outlet for the second.

The problem that emerges from seeing recent American films is that directors seem a little unsure of how to objectify into narrative the mood of indifference, the post-rebellious lassitude which they, rightly or wrongly, assume to predominate in their audiences. The trend where it is not towards the defiantly asserted lack of direction, as in the road-movies, manifests itself in stories that do not have a plot and in situations that have a kind of negative, self-demolishing dynamic. For in one sense, the American cinema still understands itself as metaphoric — a film that is not simply feeding off the genres of the 50s and its affirmative structures intends to convey (like much of the best American fiction) a central image that can stand for the present state of America: the tension betwen existential allegory and documentary naturalism is as strong as ever. Thus, one finds favoured locations that convey such overtones — the open prison in *Sugarland Express* or *The Mean Machine*, the dance hall on an ocean pier of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They*, the movie house of *The Last Picture Show*. What the heroes bring to such films is the almost physical sense of inconsequential action, of pointlessness and uselessness, a radical scepticism, in short, about the American virtues of ambition, vision, drive.

This becomes the more evident if one looks at what one might call the 'conservative' films of the '70s — the cop-thriller, for instance, which presents a desublimated version of the moralized violence and of the drive-orientated hero that used to be found in the films of the 50s. Whereas the neurotic streak in this tradition — the Cagney character of *White Heat*, the Fuller or Ray hero blemished by uncontrollable violence *(Shock Corridor, On Dangerous Ground, In A Lonely Place)* had either an anarchic grace in his romantic hubris or a moral complexity of compulsion and motivation that made him symbolic of the contradiction in the American ideal of vitality, the Clint Eastwood or Charles Bronson characters *(Dirty Harry, Death Wish)*, who are so purposive and determined, so firm and single-minded, appear powered by the purely negative energy of resentment, frustration, and a petty-bourgeois spite seeking to vent its destructive rage under the guise of a law-and-order morality. The over-determined heroes featured in excessive, violent plots are the reverse side of the unmotivated heroes in the liberal films: both typify the predicament of the commercial cinema of audience-orientation when it is attempting to represent in narrative-dramatic form the contradictions in American society and thus trying to be 'realistic'. But if violence, whether physical or emotional, is the defensive gesture of the self-alienated individual in a society he does not understand and over which he has no control, then the affirmative model of the cop thriller, and all other forms of strongly dramatized narratives, are evidently unrealistic, subjective, a compensatory reflex. The image of the non-committed hero, on the other hand, the guy who keeps his cool (who seems at first wholly depoliticised and subjective) might well be the vehicle of a perspective from which American society can be seen more analytically.

The stony faced Bronson in Death Wish

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One finds such an attempt to create an objective realism in the type of hero depicted by actors like Jack Nicholson *(Five Easy Pieces)*, James Taylor *(Two Lane Blacktop)*, Warren Beatty *(The Parallax View)* or Elliot Could *(California Split)*. But a cinema that could be considered progressive in this context would have to be more than symptomatic: one would be looking for signs that the director had thematized in the very structure of the narrative an awareness of the problem. The question comes down to how the scepticism about motives and justification in the hero, and the doubt about an experience of social and political life where reality is pasted over by ideological fictions, are translated into a formal search for a film narrative free from the parasitic and synthetic causality of a dramaturgy of conflict. On the other hand, is there a mode of representation that validates the real without encasing it in the categories of the symbolic and the spectacular? In other words, one is asking for a mise-en-scene that can differentiate, can take a critical stance. What evidence is there today that the liberal film is finding an appropriate mise-en-scene?

Warren Oates and Isela Vega in Alfredo Garcia

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Among the directors whose involvement with the dynamic-affirmative model dates back to the 50s and early 60s, Aldrich and Peckinpah (both of whom have a more than casual interest in 'violence') show most clearly that they are affected by the crisis of motivation. *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is an interesting study (within the now familiar Peckinpah thematic) of a hero who has no past to romanticise (as in

The Wild Bunch, or Junior Bonner) and who is thus more radically unmotivated than any previous Peckinpah character. When he does find a cause, it is made clear that to Benny (Warren Oates) the use of violence comes almost as a form of moral rearmament, ambiguous but devoutly desired as such violence always is in Peckinpah (cf. *The Straw Dogs)*. However, in *Alfredo Garcia* Peckinpah is both fascinated by a zero-degree of motivation and yet too sentimentally attached to the apocalypse to conceive of any narrative other than a cathartic one.

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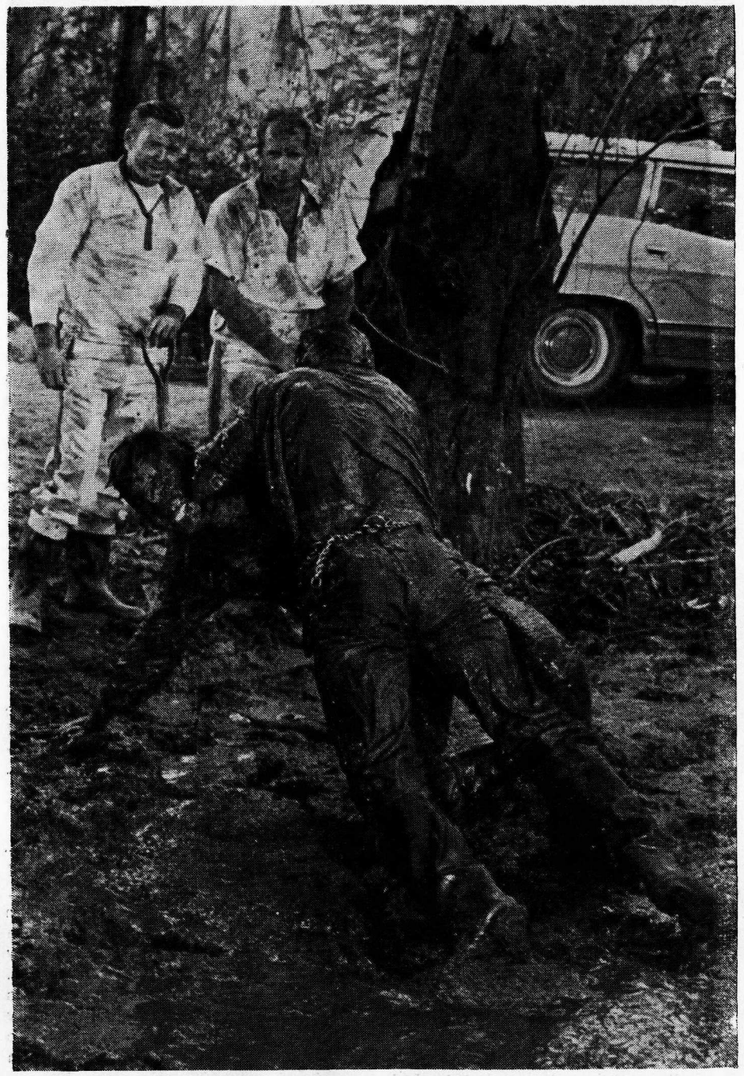
Lack of motivation is even more explicitly the subject of Aldrich's *The Mean Machine,* a movie whose complex narrative conception appears in the realization more awkward than elegant. It is as if Aldrich, as much in desperation as disgust, had broken his film into several disjointed pieces, and one can unscramble at least three strands pushed into each other. In the first, the Burt Reynolds character gets out of bed, savagely mauls his girl, drives her sports-car across a half-opened bridge-leaf, dumps it in the river and then stands at the bar waiting for the cops to pick him up. The violence is excessive, the motivation non-existent. One feels that neither movie nor hero can go in any direction whatsoever, and one wonders whether one has seen the last 15 minutes of the previous film, or the pre-credit scene to a flash-back movie that never follows. What does follow is another film which superficially belongs to the time-honoured genre of the prison film, where the hero rehabilitates himself by organizing the sports team, turning anti-social convicts into loyal team-mates. Aldrich twists the genre out of shape, and the rehabilitation does not mean release, but converts the sentence into an indefinite one. However, the real twist is that inside the second film is a third one, which by rights is not a movie at all, but a saturday-afternoon tv — baseball game complete with PA-man and cheerleaders. The suspense is accordingly puerile, and one suspects that Aldrich is giving (by default?) an object lesson about the impossibility of making dramatic films: unmotivated heroes, morally bogus genres, infantile audiences — three times he is showing us drama without consequence, three variations on one theme. A stretch of dialogue midway through the film verbalizes the situation once more: we know there is something obscure in the hero's past that concerns his motivation. His friend keeps asking 'why did you do it?'. Finally, Burt Reynolds gives an explanation, a sob-story belonging to the conventions of the rehabilitation genre, but before we have recovered from its painful pathos, Burt Reynolds starts to grin and admits that he has been having his friends on, and that he just doesn't know why he 'did' it — maybe just for the money.

Emptiness of energy and gesture... Aldrich's The Mean Machine



Clearly, in Aldrich's film, the salient fact is that whatever was important, the determining events happened long ago, and this in itself is a telling metaphor of the film's motivational predicament: if characters have no moral history that can plausibly explain their behaviour, action is the spectacle of gratuitousness. (What makes disaster movies positively archaic in the light of this is that they necessarily assume that the catastrophe is still about to happen, and that all it needs to be prepared is to rehearse it.)

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A more familiar form of self-consciousness than that practised by Aldrich is to resort to adaptation, parody, pastiche: Bogdanovitch, Altman, Polanski. *Chinatown,* a poker-faced pastiche of the *film noir* is nonetheless as contemptuous of its hero as Altman is in *The Long Goodbye,* except that Polanski's fury about having no story to tell, and yet wanting to tell it well, appeases itself in the meticulous craftsmanship of the reconstruction. Altman's parodies *(The Long Goodbye)* and reprises *(Thieves Like Us)* would appear to mark him out as the director with the most 'European' sense of fictional impasses, remiscent in fact of the Godard and Truffaut films of the mid-60s. In *Thieves Like Us* the heroes listen as compulsively to radio-shows and want to read about themselves as avidly in the newspapers as the heroes of *Band A Part* or *Baisers Volées* were caught in the seductively narcissistic mirror of the 'romanesque'. Altman, possibly taking his cue from Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde,* develops the mythopoeic magic of the American cinema's own past through the double mythomania of newspaper and radio-serial, but then, choosing a '30s setting, is he not himself helping to build up a myth? I don't think so: the movie wants to impress by its unromantic, anti-glamourizing sobriety, and it is as much anti-*Bonnie and Clyde* as in another way it is anti-*They Live By Night.*

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What is interesting is that Altman is one of the few modern directors who still occasionally employ a symbolic language that clearly belongs to the epoch of the classical mise-en-scene: the symbolization of objects through thematic use in the narrative. One would have thought that it belongs too obviously to a cinema of purposive development and positive meanings to be of use in any other form than as quotations. *Thieves Like Us* features a patchwork quilt that is given all the grand rhetorical orchestration that Shirley MacLaine's "sweetheart" pillow had in Minnelli's *Some Came Running* (a film whose symbolic objects Godard remembers in both *Le Mépris* and *Pierrot Le Fou)*. Kechie's patchwork quilt is symbolically charged in an early scene when she covers the injured Bowie and then slips under it herself when they make love for the first time. The importance of the quilt is emphasized when she explains that it was made by her grandmother and is her sole personal possession and evidence of her family. It then reappears when the two have their decisive quarrel and has its thematic apotheosis when Bowie, now a corpse riddled by police bullets, is wrapped up in it and dumped, mud- and blood-spattered, into a puddle. The price Altman pays for using such obvious dramatic symbolism is a stylized poignancy rather too overt not to disrupt the sombre, unemphatic ending, but it is in line with other formal devices (the repetition of the line from Romeo and Juliet, for instance), whereby Altman seems unsure just how self-consciously he can treat the genre he has chosen to imitate.

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The penchant for pathos, however, goes deeper. "We blew it": one remembers the resigned and melancholy admission of Captain America. For all its traditionalist plot elements and stylistic uncertainties, *Easy Rider* still functions along with *Bonnie and Clyde* as the only popular and successful alternatives to the affirmative stance. Not just because it is a film about heroes without a goal who take 'drive' out of the psychic and onto the road, and who take 'trip' off the road and into the mind, but also as a paradigm of the open-ended loose-structured narrative, so frequently imitated since. The heroes are still motivated, though, for thematically *Easy Rider* revives the ever-present motif in American culture about the male couple ganging up to escape civilization and women. In fact, the double male lead still predominates (from *Midnight Cowboy, Butch Cassidy..., The Sting* down to *California Split* and *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot)* and has become a genre for both conformist and drop-out attitudes. The permutations reach from Ashby's *The Last Detail* to Spielberg's *Sugarland Express,* the latter particularly interesting, because a Bonnie and Clyde type story ends up as the sentimental love-story of the all-male couple, when the young policeman taken hostage befriends and is in turn befriended by the boy whom we know from the start to be a very reluctant acomplice in his wife's hi-jack trip to recover her baby.

Over all the movies that take to the road on quests that are escapes and escapes that are quests, there hangs like a haze the sweet poignancy of defeat. At the end, when they face the law, the rednecks, the mean-mouthed farmers and hick petrol attendants, the scowling women and bragging middle-aged men with fast cars and high-powered rifles — all those who were already there before the heroes came on the scene and who win out and survive, as they invariably do, then the characters' wry self-abandonment and lassitude registers with the particular pathos reserved for 'beautiful losers'; and the cool mockery, the detached satire which such films direct against the America of the silent majority fades out on a wave of self-pity.

If one sees this simply in thematic or ideological terms, the new American cinema here shows its weakest side. For it appears that directors opt for a kind of realism of sentiment that tries to be faithful to the negative experiences of recent American history, and the movies reflect the moral and emotional gestures of a defeated generation, but this strategy — since it is concerned neither with cause nor historical circumstances — gives both heroes and the world that dooms them a mystification and starkness of contrast which must finally affect the intelligence of the observation and therefore the value of the new realism. The narrowness of the emotional response at the climax of *Thieves Like Us* is counteracted by a kind of emotionally flat coda, and it is noticeable that a lot of the so-called nostalgia pictures have

Variations on a theme: highway robbery in Sugarland Express

... the road movie grinds to a halt

such an epilogue (cf *American Graffiti):* it neutralizes the dramatic charge. By foregoing the dramaturgy of interpersonal conflict, suspense, intrigue or the self-alienated aggressiveness of emotional frustration, the films are somehow led to stylizing despair into the pathos of failure. On other hand, it answers the pressing problem of how to end an indeterminate narrative: pathos provides the emotional closure to an open-ended structure and retrieves effective contact with the audience.

Thus, if one feels uncomfortable about the unqualified emotional sympathy enjoyed by the heroes of *Thieves Like Us, Sugarland Express* or *American Graffiti,* one needs to bear in mind that under cover of such a relatively simple but effective hold over the spectator's involvement and identification a new type of popular film narrative is trying to cope with the technical problem of how to depict the unmotivated hero. While European directors — from Straub to Rivette, from Bunuel to Tanner — can conduct an experimentation into the nature of a narrative not generated by any of the conventional dramatic supports such as melodrama, quest, investigation, journey (though as one knows, Bunuel is more than ever committed to the picaresque model), and can work at purely situational narratives *(Céline et Julie se vont en Bateau)* in the comforting knowledge of an appreciative intellectual audience, the pressures on experimentation in the commercial cinema are obviously different. Where French directors in particular like to allow the fictional substance of their films to whittle itself out of existence through an ever-more sophisticated play of multiple fictional strands and fragments, such possibilities are not open to an American director faced with a similar dilemma of representational realism: his remains an audience-orientated cinema that permits no explicitly intellectual narrative construction. Consequently, the innovatory line in the American cinema can be seen to progress not via conceptual abstraction but by shifting and modifying traditional genres and themes, while never quite shedding their support, be it to facilitate recognition or for structuring the narrative. In search of a new realism, Altman or Hellman after periods of non-commercial experimentation (*Brewster McCloud, The Shooting*) can now be seen to return to the realm of the thematic material that is, as it were, culturally coded and cinematically sanctioned. One can see them in their recent films go the narrow path between locating a new image of America and the need to keep in touch with the visual and emotional rhetoric of their culture, and thereby keep open the lines of communication with a mass-public. The price of historical relevance seems to be an acknowledgement of the reigning ideology, and the condition of realism in this situation is the emotional stance of defeat.

In this connexion, it seems to me that the much maligned 'trend' of the nostalgia movie should be regarded under a double aspect. Certainly, *Paper Moon, American Graffiti* are testimony to a symptomatic search for an affirmative, innocent past, free from guilt and responsibility. But the quest for a lost national Eden, perhaps more overtly apologetic in films like *Summer of '42* or *The Way We Were* in which a pointedly non-political apprehension of reality is rather shamefacedly celebrated against the background of a political period, this quest not only communicates a direct thematization of the absence of consequence and history, which, I have tried to suggest, is one of the structurally and ideologically determined features of the American cinema today, it also gives some directors the opportunity to scan a historical and geographical American landscape — notably the Depression era, the early 50s, small-town rural communities — for clues towards what one might call a new verisimilitude of the cinematic image. It is not a question of a pristine visual experience, nor of a documentary objectivity, more the pursuit of a gestural and physical world that connotes historicity and is culturally resonant without being overtly symbolic — set up in contrast to the perfected glamour, the aesthetic closure of beauty as it has been (often falsely) attributed to Hollywood itself, and which critics refer to as the fetishism of the aesthetic illusion. How else is one to understand the assiduous work, say , of Altman who seems bent on emotionally charging the rough, the squalid, the unattractive and plain, the imperfect and incomplete in *McCabe and Mrs Miller, Thieves Like Us, The Long Goodbye, California Split*? Particularly in his genre movies he uses the pathos of historical patina and nostalgia to transform objects and decor — from mining town to Coke bottle and heart-shaped purse — into signs: not into symbols to be used in another kind of discourse (this is why the patchwork quilt in *Thieves Like Us* is so exceptional, for it points in the other direction, that of the classical mise-en-scene, in which objects and decor *are* the material of a meta-discourse), but to refer to themselves, while raising expectations of a pay-off on the level of positive meanings which never quite constitutes itself, except parodistically.

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In his experimentation with a reality untainted or overdetermined by the symbolic accretions that have made so much of the American urban and rural landscape into dramatic clichés, Altman seems to admit the status of the image as inescapable sign, but its sign character can be exploited by focussing emotional resonance on its palpable facticity. Plot, genre convention and intrigue henceforth function in an inverse sense; instead of providing the continuity and logic of the narrative that guarantees the coherence of the secondary level of meaning they become simply the vehicle of a phatic communication underscoring discrete visual moments voided of any specific moral significance. In the absence of any positive motivation of either hero or plot, the pathos of failure becomes the zero-degree of these moralized emotions which the dynamics of eroticism and violence supplied to the classical narrative.

Similar tendencies can be observed elsewhere, they extend beyond the nostalgia and genre-films. In a sense, it is easier to test the possibilities of such an unmetaphoric realism in the context of historical reconstruction or the pre-formulated expectation of the genre, for they give the narrative a provisional structure of empathy and recognition. Yet films with a contemporary setting, such as *Five Easy Pieces* or *Two Lane Blacktop* are generated out of the same desire for an image of America that becomes palpable not because of the interplay between moral symbolism and an ideological plot-struture, but because of its solid specificity, its realized physical presence — whatever the degree of dramatic intensification such films employ to make this realism acceptable. And again we find the same tautological pathos that charges the image with emotion while neutralizing its moral energy. Significantly, Rafelson, Hellman, Spielberg and others choose a 'rural' America, recognizable by its stretches of barren roadside, its drive-ins, petrol-stations and hick town main-streets — the kind of scenery precisely nowhere and everywhere in America, and therefore furnishing an important element of abstraction without being itself abstract. It is a scenery that obviously has the sanction and precedent of the *film noir,* that other high period of an almost documentary realism in the American cinema, but this time, without the black romanticism of mood nor the heavy machinery of fate and destiny knitting together character and incident. Comparable movies today are low-keyed, de-dramatized, but ultimately not so different in their insistence on the emotional stance appropriate to American realism — negativity, a defensive cool, the somewhat sentimental gestures of defeat. One way of looking at it is to say that the new realism is itself a defensive stance: is not the focus on rural America something of an anthropological perspective on an America where nothing ever seems to happen, where time has stood still and where a people survives that apparently has no history? One remembers the encounter of the heroes in *Deliverance* with the banjo-playing cretinous boy. In the very understatement of the scene is hidden an anxious wariness for clues to what it was that has made America of the 60s what it so apallingly is today, as if only the secluded places, the gaps and silences could give an explanation for the violence, the paranoia, as if only rural hamlets could explain urban ghettos and suburban hysterics. A favourite image, put to good effect in *Thieves Like Us,* is to show a fine silence at dawn in an idyllic landscape suddenly torn apart by a furious exchange of gunfire (c.f. also *Sugarland Express).*

Faced with such symbolic re-enactments of morning raids on the Black Panthers or Kent State incidents, one wonders how long directors can go on codifying the experience of a rebellion whose impulse towards change aborted, and which (where it does not lead to a pathos of loss) is now somehow transfixed in stunned moments of inconsequentiality, such as that of George Segal piling up his chips at the end of *California Split,* or Gene Hackman sitting in his demolished

room in *The Conversation*. Today's heroes are waiting for the end, convinced that it is too late for action, as if too many contradictions had cancelled the impulse towards meaning and purpose. In *Two Lane Blacktop* everything goal-directed appears simply neurotic, uncool, a compensation for frustration, like the fantasies of GTO, the Warren Oates character. In *American Graffiti* the action, the constant stream of cars circling the town's main-street, revolves around an 'empty' centre: the mythical DJ whose disembodied 'Wolfman' is nothing more mysterious than a lonely man sitting amongst a lot of technology in his radio-mast eating sandwiches. Clearly in a period of historical stasis, these movies reflect a significant ideological moment in American culture. One might call them films that dramatize the end of history, for what is a story, a motivated narrative (which such movies refuse to employ) other than an implicit recognition of the existence of history, at least in its formal dimension — of driving forces and determinants, of causes, conflicts, consequences and interaction?

However, there is another point: if one considers as I have suggested the pervasive pessimism of the American cinema in the 70s less as a personal statement of their authors and more as the limiting constraint of the new realism, the price it pays for being exploratory, then the strength of a film like *Two Lane Blacktop* lies in the way that, sheltered by the structure of the journey motif, it quietly steers towards a level of abstraction, a documentary minimalism unknown in the Hollywood canon except perhaps in the work of Jacques Tourneur. Released from the fable and from the need to engineer the narrative into didactic shape, the images develop an energy that charges representation with something other than symbolic overtones or metaphoric substitutes: one is, naturally, reminded of the studied literalness in Paul Morissey's films for Andy Warhol, but Hellman's film is free from the claustrophobia so carefully controlled in *Flesh* or *Trash*. Whether the cancellation of the melodramatic impulse and the search for non-literary narrational rhythms will suggest less problematic down-beat endings is difficult to say: the freeze-frame nowadays connotes no more than the indecisiveness of the director on just this point. In *Two Lane Blacktop,* by its own logic, the drive, and thus the film, could go on indefinitely: that is its beauty as a composition of pure movement. The ending — in order to work — quite clearly, must have the status of a 'device': Hellman motivates his hero, the James Taylor character, rather conventionally when underneath his cool he reveals an obsession with the girl. This impulse is allowed to live itself out, albeit destructively — he takes risks and finally meets his nemesis. But cinematically, the ending is aptly 'formal': Hellman lets the image burn itself out in the projector in extreme slow-motion, clearly a metaphor both for the hero's obsession and the film itself.

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The fact that this ending is borrowed from Skolimowski's *Le Départ,* also a film about racing and impossible quests, throws an interesting sidelight on the no doubt complex interchange between European and American film-making today. Tentatively, however, one might assume that both, aware of essentially similar problems, proceed along different routes. Against multiple fictions and double diegesis, the American directors prefer to desymbolize their cinematic language, dedramatize their narratives, to strengthen the inner dynamism of their scenes: the momentum of action gives way to the moment of gesture. A new form of mise-en-scene seems in the making that could mean a revaluation of the real on the far side of either fetishistic fixation or conceptual abstraction. In that case, the unmotivated hero and the pathos of failure will be the double negatives that result in a positive.

Thomas Elsaesser

In the steps of Nicholas Ray. Keith Carradine in Robert Altman's Thieves Like Us

The Assassination of Trotsky

England/France/Italy 1972 **Dir** Joseph Losey **Ed** Reginald Beck **Phot** Pasquale de Santis **Scen** Nicholas Mosley **Prod Des** Richard Macdonald **Art Dir** Arrigo Equini **Cast** Richard Burton (Trotsky) Alain Delon (Jacson) Romy Schneider (Gita) Valentine Cortese (Natalya) Giergo Albertazzi Luigi Vanucchi Dulio de Prete Jean Desailly Simon Valere Carlos Miranda 103 mins.

Amarcord: Riminese dialect: *I remember.* A handful of movies — mainly Italian — whose fascination resided (long before one saw them) in their untranslatable titles. Rossellini: *Viaggio in Italia* — the awkwardness of the English translation *Journey in Italy* echoed by a kind of literal *dépaysment* in the principle characters George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman. Through Rossellini, Godard: *Le Mépris* translated (correctly of course) as *Contempt,* but in the loss of the definite article, a complete change of connotation, which so to speak prevents one from speculating what the movie might be about in a contemptuous castration of sense. In each of these films (and one can think of others—e.g. Truffaut's *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* and *La Nuit Americaine) the* difficulty of translation turned out to be echoed on the thematic level: they were among other things *about* the confrontation of cultures and languages which their intransigent titles seemed to emblematize. (Consider for example the role of linguistic intermediary between the American Palance and Michel Piccoli that Giorgia Moll occupies in Godard's film). For the directors concerned, this cosmopolitanism might have defined itself as: *a fascination with foreign actors and actresses.* (It is still the interest of watching Burt Lancaster or Farley Granger perform in Italian).

The "play" of language pitches these films in a certain sense towards dream. The oneiric quality of Losey's film, the result of a kind of geographical dislocation symbolised in its multi-national production line-up, is responsible for its continued strangeness after two or three viewings (just as in another way it is doubtless equally responsible for its commercial failure). Perhaps one should stick on this last for a moment. The commercially successful political thriller of the last few years has been European: *Lacombe Lucien, The Conformist, State of Siege* — chic, glossy, intelligent straightforward entertainments. By contrast, the old 'auteur' masters — Preminger, Hitchcock, Losey — have provided interesting films with political subjects that have all of them somehow failed to get off the ground (eg. that brilliant film *Topaz).* They are caught in peculiar problem of the *signifié.* At what level do the events portrayed correspond to real political conflicts? The *thriller form* in which these films are made seems to *fictionalize* them to just the wrong degree (that's to say, to just the degree that is confusing at the box-office). Whereas the current European cinema's *investigation of fascism* along liberal lines allows one to know exactly where one stands: a highly commercial mixture of elegant reconstruction (cars, clothes, furnishing, *women* — see Resnais's *Stavisky)* on the one hand, and portentous historical investigation on the other: Santayana's dictum taken down and dusted at the beginning of *Lacombe Lucien:* "Those who forget history are condemned to repeat it". *(Tristana* is above all this: I agree so far as it goes with David Morse's article/review of Bunuel in Monogram no 5).

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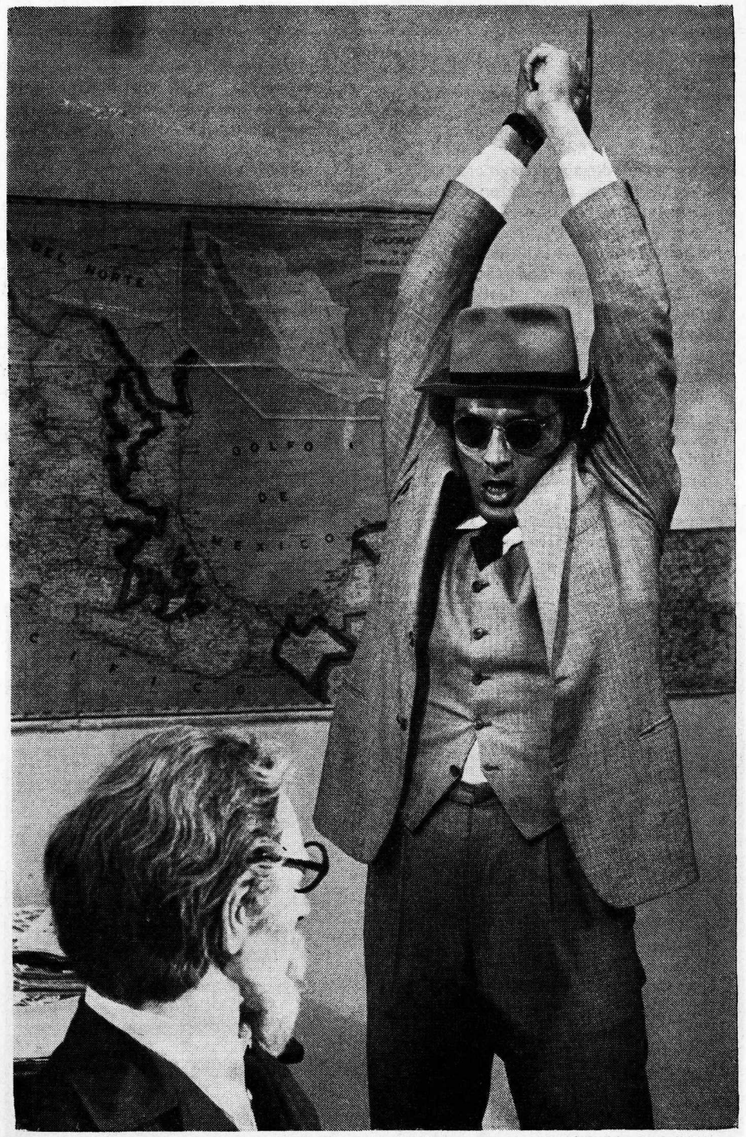
To return to Losey: the pull between Hollywood thriller and European "historical reconstruction" casts this enterprise adrift — very fruitfully, as I shall argue. A strange tension exists in the movie between Europe and America — *imagined* Europe and *imagined* America. Trotsky's exile in Mexico and Losey's artistic exile in Europe overlap and complement each other, but not at all portentously. As violently as *Vent d'Est,* this is a film about art and politics — or in other words, like Godard's, a film about Stalin. Multiple reverberations of fate — in a particularly memorable shot, the different burnished, curved levels of the roof of the Mexican cathedral on which Delon as the future assassin meets his Russian contact seem to stand as the very metaphor for the complexity of Losey's enterprise. (More than a metaphor. It is the mise-en-scene which *is* the complexity! — see below). Whose fates are we talking about? Not only Trotsky's, but all the celebrated Russians who had in their own way served the revolution and received their sardonic rewards (the film has this extraordinary level of cultural and historical resonance). Gorki: another *assassinee,* whose fictional triumphs were being made into "enduring classics of the Russian screen" by Donskoi at just the moment (c. 1936, 37) when he himself was being executed. Einstein: whose own "Mexican adventure" had ended in fiasco, and who is memorialised in this movie by the magnificent use Losey makes of the Mexican murals — great bold slices of colour, the energy of painted icons, struggling peons, the "new" Mexico of scientists, craftsman, artisans (the opening shots of the film are a splendid reconstruction of a political demonstration in a people's republic). By a miracle of metaphorical substitution, of which the absent Eisenstein is the key, the shabby splendour of Mexico, its mixture of colour and drabness, *becomes* the Soviet state itself in its post-revolutionary confusion. (I am trying to comment on the particular level of realism this film seems to occupy, as both a precise reconstruction of a historical epoch — absolutely distinct, individual, memorable, with none of the chic bows to the thirties that one might have expected — and at the same time a film that goes *beyond this level,* but onto which, one is stuck for words to describe succesfully. Symbolic? Poetical? Neither quite capture the sense in which the film exists in both its incarnations simultaneously).

In the end one is forced back to a notion like mise-en-scene, fully aware that the phrase is rather inflated currency these days. *Cahiers du Cinema* used to wax lyrical about the way that a single camera set-up, or the length of a single pan subsumed a whole moral economy, and one feels this is right for Losey. It is more than simply elegance. In fact the shots I am thinking of in *The Assassination of Trotsky* are not particularly "elegant", if one means by that the kind of suavity of camerawork, the virtuosity, that one associated in the past with Welles, and that has come down to us in slightly debased form in the contemporary work of Bertoluci or Antonioni. On the contrary, these shots are very simple and even, like some of Godard's audacities of deliberation, "boring". An example is the scene on the riverboat where the camera performs a 180 degree turn — a truly Godardian slowness — linking the separated Schneider and Delon lying at opposite ends of the boat: elementary choreography — striking, direct and obvious — that manages to suggest at the same time fantastic *complexity of mood:* irrevocable separation, brooding violence (the sharp, bold reds and yellows of the boat's stern), a kind of portentous drowsiness, the whole sequence very beautiful and dreamlike — like certain pastoral interludes from Eisenstein's *Strike* (the drooping willows over the canal's edge, the shabby "dachas" along the bank). It is a feature of even the insignificant scenes. There is a short sequence where Delon, below, stands talking to the guards of Trotsky's villa on their tower lookout which might act as a model of economical exposition, whereby the essentially diagonal lines of the visual composition repeated again and again in the individual shots come to stand for the way in which *clarity* and *obliqueness* are one and the same in works of this degree of formal mastery: (everything that is clear, distanced, cool, conceptual).

The Assassination of Trotsky altogether might be the subject of an interesting essay on cinematic mise-en-scene, since thematically it is so clearly tied up with architecture. Trotsky's exile is lived out in a fortress-like structure, part palace, part prison, whose bizarre and arresting lines Losey uses with characteristic formal boldness (as he has always treated houses). The scene just mentioned where Delon chats to the guards occurs after the place has been unsuccessfully raided by Stalin's agents, and the walls are in the process of being repaired and strengthened. As the guards patiently add another layer of bricks and mortar, while elsewhere the inside walls are given a coat of vivid white paint (presumably the better to pick out nighttime raiders), one assists at the very spectacle of the construction of mise-en-scene, or in other words the way in which physical properties of architecture (boldness, elegance, line) *become* the actual tensions of the drama — the exteriorization of psychological conflict. So too with the Stalinist agent (Delon's boss) whose occupation turns out to be a painter of murals, which are used to vivid effect in the scene where — another long, slow retreating camera shot — the raiding party unpack their stolen police uniforms in a hired studio-warehouse, while huge unfinished papier-maché puppets littered around provide an atmosphere at once theatrical and menacing.

This use of construction-in-progress as a metaphor for the way the filmmaker delimits meaning, setting up its formal boundaries in space, or, in other words, making a conceptual discourse *visible,* is throughout the movie demonstrated almost schematically. (One can think offhand of one or two other instances where this process is demonstrated with equal clarity. The *arch* in Frank Borzage's *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), the *primum mobile* of architecture, as we are told by an ex-architecture student (Gary Cooper) now serving in the ambulance corps, becomes in a brilliant series of montages (the very *architecture* of the movie) the symbol of his love for the English nurse (Helen Hayes). Just as in Losey's film, the formal geometry is only sustained by *tension,* threatening to crash down on the lovers like the upreared statue of the horse and rider in the arbour where they have first made love; much as in *The Assassination of Trotsky* the massive upreared bronze bulls outside the corrida point forward to the collapse of the fragile web of relationships in the violence of the movie's resolution. Elegance, simplicity, and coolness of construction; swiftness and violence of release: the *emotional dynamics* of both these films. In Borzage, tragedy; in Losey, tragic farce (a symptom of the makeshift quality of Trotsky's Mexico, its "theatricality" in the farcical sense — the sardonic "baroque" humour of *Boom!* and *Modesty Blaise).* In the meantime, one might comment in a general way on how successfully certain filmmakers respond to the locations they use, which can only ever be partially constructed to their specifications. Making use of what is at hand with a brilliant, perfectionist eye for detail; the ability to use the angles and planes and colours of the room or studio in which the film is shot, without at the same time drawing overt attention to one's technique; avoiding a too obvious symbolism, yet imperceptibly *structuring* the movie in the way one wants it to go — this is the characteristic *aesthetic economy* of the great Hollywood auteurs of whom Losey, despite his exile, remains an example.

An audacious stylization. Trotsky (Richard Burton) awaiting the assassin's axe



Burton, as Trotsky, is the liability: the *price paid* to get the money to make the kind of film Losey wanted. There must be a moral somewhere. One resurrects *The Assassination of Trotsky* not as a pious act of film scholarship (to use the title of a recent issue of *Velvet Light Trap:* "Forbidden, forgotten, rejected and unlucky films", but because it points to the peculiar hazards of making an idiosyncratically political film within commercial structures. At all events the gamble misfired, at least commercially — and perhaps in the scenes with Burton, artistically as well. Roland Barthes speaks of a certain Darmès, a political conspirator whose hatred of the aristocracy was signalled in the way he spelt the word: haristaukrassie. Written thus, as Hugo says, "le mot est assez terrible". There is an opposite 'value' or timbre in Burton's voice, the voice of the *Shakespearian actor,* where pathos is exteriorised as a particular unctuousness. In the scenes where Trotsky records his memoirs into a primitive recording machine, it is this resonance that is put into the way he pronounces words like "magnanimity" and "unfathomable". Burton as Trotsky,*Burton as Churchill* — what is the difference? (One is only waiting for — Burton as Stalin!) The key throughout is one of resigned nobility: the voice of a man who has experienced, suffered — and feels weary. One speculates: but what if that was exactly the way one *didn't* present Trotsky?

Yet the avoidance of cliché is problem-

atic in this film which is anyhow prodigiously stylised, and in a certain sense deliberately obvious: the scene where Delon in the scrapyard *catches sight of the ice-axe;* or, even more obviously, the parallelism between killing the bull and the bloodiness of the actual assassination. There is a strange undercurrent of farce throughout, so that, perhaps Burton's impersonation of Trotsky as an irritable old Oxford don is part of the movie's fruitful ambiguity, as opposed to its incoherence. Do we give ourselves and Losey the benefit of the doubt? The project is anyhow almost impossibly difficult. How does one dramatise the intellectual? *It is not enough to give him a pair of spectacles* (as the luckless hero of Leto's *La Villegiatura* gets saddled with). Relieved of the necessity attached to political films of a more specific commitment to make of Trotsky what Cahiers now call *un héros positif,* Losey might seem to be falling back on a certain "tragic" reading of Brecht — the Brecht of *Mother Courage* and *Galileo* — in order to present Trotsky in somewhat traditional artistic terms: a great spirit broken by impossible contradictions, haunted by his past as, equally, he suffers premonitions of his future. Yet tragic irony is always the most obvious irony. Cinema's great ability is to displace this irony and the humanist message that goes with it in an exteriorization of affect — into object, into gesture, into violence, into movement — that is responsible, *at least partially,* for the extraordinary exhibition of mise-en-scene that makes up *The Assassination of Trotsky.* The film's other excellences — the absolute rightness of the supporting cast, the tenderness of the relationship between Trotsky and his wife Natesha (paralleled by the intensity Delon and Schneider bring to the parts of the assassin and his unhappy mistress), the completely intransigent violence of the death scenes — everything held together in the ordered flow of narrative: suavity of diegesis — mastery of filmmaking.

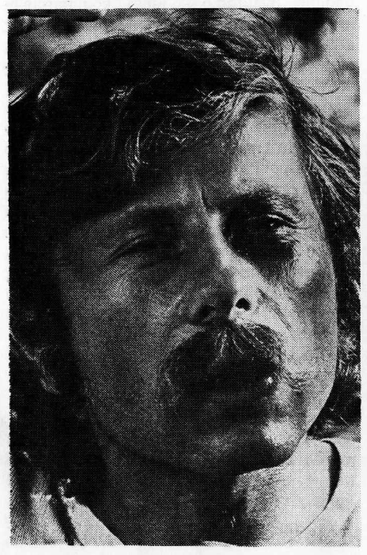
Clare Vildrac

What?

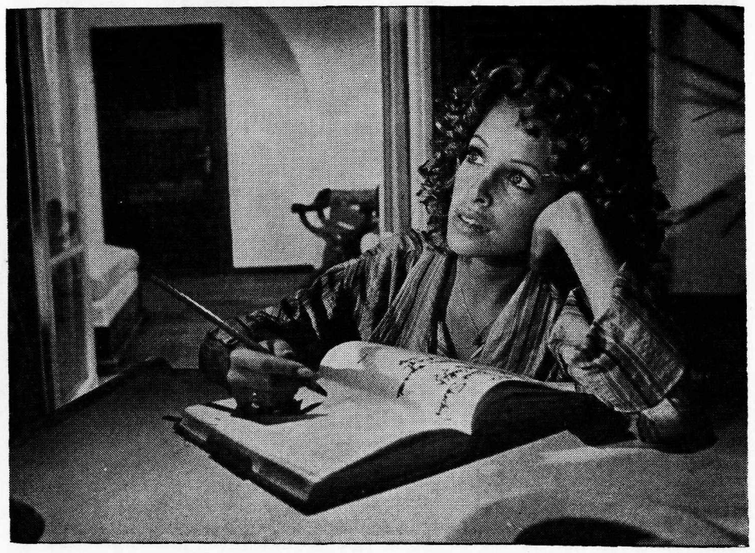
Italy/France/West Germany 1972 **Dir** Roman Polanski **Prod** Carlo Ponti **Scen** Gerard Brach, Roman Polanski **Phot** Marcello Gatti, Giuseppe Ruzzolini **Ed** Alistair Mc Intyre **Des** Aurelio Crugnola **Cast** Sydne Rome (Nancy) Marcello Mastroianni (Alex) Hugh Griffith (Noblart) Roman Polanski (Mosquito) Romolo Valli Guido Alberti Gianfranco Piacentini Elisabeth Witte **Prod** C.C. Champion (Rome)/Les Films Concordia (Paris)/Geissler (Munich) 113 mins.

"Nancy (Sydne Rome), a wide-eyed American hitch-hiker, loses her luggage but salvages her honour and her large diary when a carload of Italians attempt gang rape on a moonlit journey through the montains. She eludes their pursuit by descending the mountainside in a fragile, open-air lift which deposits her outside the palatial villa of a moribund Hugh Griffith. Here she is given accommodation, but wakes in the morning to find that her only T-shirt has been stolen. With her bosom covered only by a small table napkin, she attracts the attention of Alex (Marcello Mastroianni), a recently retired pimp, who proposes an afternoon tryst. While waiting to meet him Nancy appropriates a pyjama top and meets some of the villa's other residents: two lesbian sunbathers; an eccentric priest; the diminutive Mosquito (Polanski himself), whose principle interest is his harpoon gun; Jimmy, an obsessive cook, and Tony, an insatiable stud, both of whom may be Alex's sons. At their rendezvous Alex dresses in a tiger skin, and persuades Nancy to whip him, after which she is happily defiled. That night, after finding her room occupied by a middle-aged American couple, she awakes from a sleep on the beach to discover that her blue-jeans have been removed, probably by Mosquito. Jimmy, who had been in love with her innocence, is not very helpful, and she ends the night playing a Mozart duet with Hugh Griffith's arthritic administrative assistant, Giovanni. The next day provides some minor variations on the last: one of Nancy's legs is painted blue by a lecherous decorator; Alec dresses as a carabiniero and flagellates her before consuming his fatigued passion; then Hugh Griffith ("Noblart") persuades her to grant him a glimpse of her pudenda and dies in a moment of ecstatic nostalgia. Suddenly pursued by all the villa's occupants, Nancy — her few remaining garments snatched by the guard-dog — regains the road and climbs inside a truck full of pigs. It is, she assures Alex, the only way to end the movie." *(Monthly Film Bulletin,* May *1974).*

Polanski alias Mosquito



A diary is a girl's best friend . . .



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" . . . the works of modernity: their value would derive from their duplicity. This is to say that they have always two sides. The subversive side might seem privileged since it is that of violence, but it is not violence which affects pleasure, which has no interest in destruction; what it aspires to is the locus of a loss, is lapse, fissure, deflation, the "fading" which seizes the subject at the heart of its extasy."

R. Barthes Le Plaisir du Texte

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What? is, in Barthes' terminology, an example of a modern cine-text, *texte de jouissance,* that seems to ask for something like a *sémanalyse* as we have seen applied to literary texts. (In a moment of weakness one may be tempted to wonder just what had constituted Polanski's reading matter lately, and how interested he could possibly be in recent developments of French literary criticism.)

On a most superficial level the conventions of narrative are heavily ruptured in *What?,* and the continuity is in Brechtian fashion split up by the collision of episodes without actual (natural) or conventionalised-symbolic transitions, and producing the well-known *Verfremdungseffekt* that frustrates any illusionistic empathy and self-abandonment. More subtly, its own symbolic codes continually collide, and we may apply the following passage by Barthes on Sade with hardly any change to *What?:*

" . . . contradictory codes (for example, the noble and the trivial) come into contact; pompous and ridiculous neologisms are coined, pornographic messages moulded in phrases so pure they might be taken for examples of grammar. As the theory of text says: language is redistributed. But this re-distribution *always takes place by disjunction.* Two sides are outlined: the one prudent, conformist, plagiaristic (a question of copying language in its canonical state such as it has been fixed by education, usage, literature and culture); and *another side,* mobile, protean, (ready to follow any contours), and which is finally ever only the place of its own effect: the point from which one glimpses the death of language. "

A plot summmary like the one cited above is thus obviously of little help and beside the point, and contrasts sharply with the very different objective of this essay.

A preliminary but important difference ought to be pointed out that marks a *ciné-sémanalyse* as opposed to its literary cousin: While the re-creation of a literary text is (in theory) readily achieved (cf. Barthes' S/Z), the cine-critic is forced to switch medium and substitute pen for camera; where he would long for a retake, or wish to freeze a transition of frame to frame into a timeless still, to flash back at will or perform whatever his savouring of the text would require, his medial substitution entails unseemly descriptive paragraphs, plot summaries, distortions of time and movement caused by his verbal struggle and not necessarily reflecting adequately his chosen reading. Hence the ciné-sémanalyse will never be able to stand in the same relation to its prototext the film, as does, say, S/Z to "Sarrasine"; yet neither should this proviso serve to cover up worse imperfections in the following analysis with the excuse of an imperfectible task.

In the cinema it is perhaps, or should be, more obvious that the *sujet du texte* is in fact the spectator, that like Barthes' reader-writer he is the maker of his film.. For in literature there is above all powerful distracting factor: our experientially conditioned willingness to assume the role of the "you" vis-a-vis the "I" of any verbal formulation, which allows us to regard any discourse as that of another, and relegate identification to some more removed plane. Characters are ideal objects for such voyeuristic transference, which moreover can be further indulged or partially withdrawn according to our judgement of these characters at any stage. And when the narrative is unproblematic and the manipulation of the medium successfully obliterated, the spectator projects most easily onto protagonists and grows unaware of his textual role as subject.

. . . but should one record these encounters?

One of the most popular variations of classical narrative is the dual possibility for identification, according to sex, which offers a couple for hero and heroine so as to pose no difficulties for those unwilling to cross sexual barriers in their imagination. *What?* is a long way from this innocent paradigm, and selfconsciously reflects its evolutionary history. While literature has explored a multitude of differentiation from this basic pattern, the cinema has on the whole remained conspicuously faithful to it. Yet if *What?* is subversive it is of course precisely to this established paradigm that it subversively refers, by on the one hand seeming to offer the conventional signals for identification and expecting from the spectator the ability to read them, and on the other hand obstructing the fullfilment of just this process. In other words, this paradigm of classical narrative and hero identification forms part of the cinematic language in its canonical state.

We need to consider further conventions that are intricately connected with identification and which together form the complex network of processes that make possible a reading of the film-text. The most obvious one, especially for the cinema, is the ineluctible plot or action, which with some simplification we may consider axiomatic for the commercial feature-film, together with a generous dosage of verisimilitude.

Plot and hero identification are interdependent, in that the spectator resolves the one with the help of the other. In *What?* he is forced to fall back on his most primitive tactics in his struggle to determine either. In the jungle of *What?'s* non-plot he desperately gropes for a hero as a point of reference and focalisation; potentially (and hopefully) doubts regarding his choice of a hero seek confirmation and clarification in the plot. But this *sujet du texte* is hard put to define itself and become master of its discourse — "de se poser comme possesseur de son discours", — that is to make sense of its film. And what is worse, a message from Polanski refuses to be extracted. Thus it brings home to the spectator most effectively that he is indeed the subject of the cine-text, that it is for him to make sense out of two hours of projected images, instead of being able to sit back and make himself the confidant of an author. The author's Word, though the traps are set, is not to be ascertained either in the philosophical profundities of Heraclitus as revised by Bergson ("You cannot step into the same river twice, as it won't be the same river", or: identical shots are not the same, if only because they are inserted at different places on the reel), nor in the little portrait in the corner, of Polanski alias Mosquito: as the latter disappears behind the terrace wall to dive into an ocean we never see (the undergrowth of the park?), so Polanski, our film-maker, exits conspicuously from his own discourse, to leave the spectator swimming on his own in that extremely fluid medium: *What?* For he is a swimmer, and under heavy attack: "un sujet en procès, s'attaquant à toutes les stases d'un sujet unaire", a subject in a mobile position, that pluralises itself, dissolves. Failing to discern the Voice of the master the viewer casts about for a hero to hold on to. And indeed, Nancy sends out all

the signals of the conventional heroine: She is the most foregrounded and constant presence in the film, for us a red thread on which the episodes are strung, and all the more endearing since she shares our perspective to an important degree, in that she, too, is baffled by the events that happen to her and fails to make sense of the scene at the Villa Ponti. And like us she feigns a certain non-concern in the face of her bewilderment, continuing to act as if she were 'in control' (while we pretend to 'follow' the film).

She looks the prototype of a heroine, too: young, attractive, just "slightly better than ourselves", to make the female spectator admire and envy her, the male desire her in good Aristotelian custom, while at the same time identifying a certain audience, largely that addressed by contemporary advertising, specified as 'trendy' by the current T-shirt and jeans uniform, the near afro-look and the Life-Style of the Young, hitch-hiking around Europe (a post-filmic destination in Istanbul, "And Afganistan last year".) Yet while encouraging such recognition and identification, this caricature of a contemporary heroine at the same time perplexes through over perfection: while the young woman in, say, *Zabriskie Point* is just convincing, Nancy is too much the filmstar, straight from the cover of *Vogue* (or even the Sunday Colour Supplement). Her immaculate make-up is against the original creed, and every hair of her casual mane seems the result of a masterly design by some Haute-Coiffeur on Broadway and transfixed by the leading make of hair spray. Such incongruity is heresy for the faithful and ironic for the less fashionable, and reveals its own contradictions: a commercialised hippy, or a *femme fatale* with the mind of a schoolgirl.

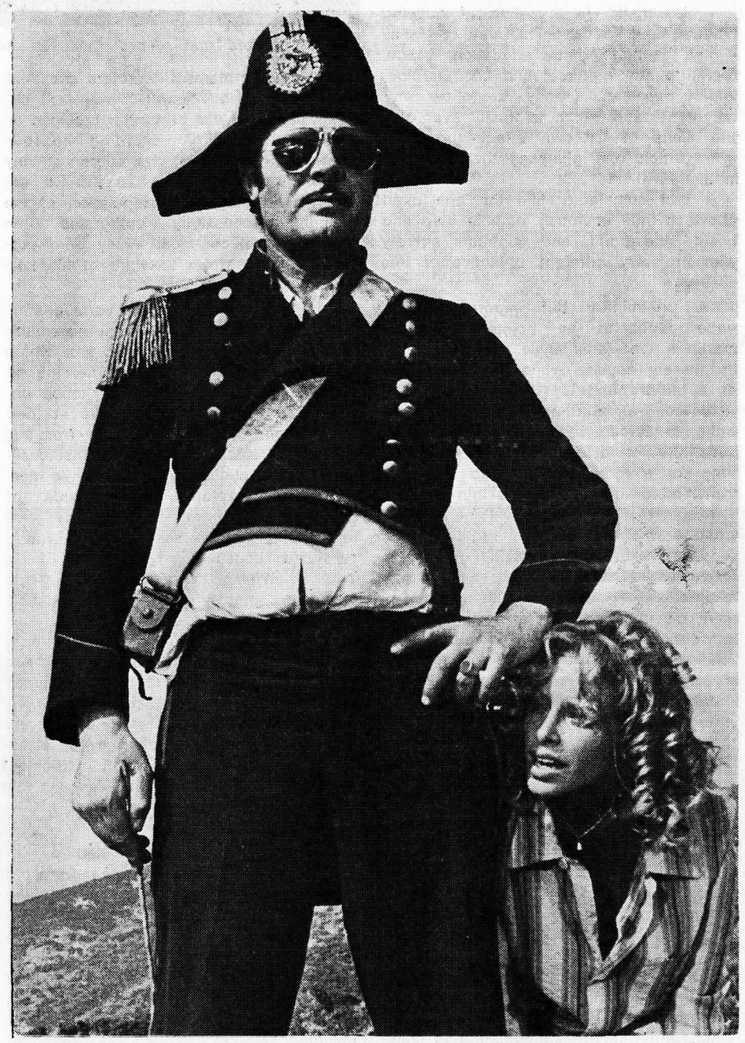
And if doubts are raised by the sign of a heroine on her first appearance, unreserved identification becomes completely impossible once she becomes part of the syntagmatic chain of continuous cliché remarks and stock responses.

For the male who has heard of sexism and its commercial manipulation is gripped by his conscience, just as he believed himself excused from exercising his liberated conscience by what appeared such a generous measure of uncensored sex; while the feminist ready to spot and denounce victimisation of the female is silenced at seeing the victim play her role so eagerly: the more humiliation Alex adds to Nancy's self-esteem the firmer her attachment to him, and the most violent and stock-pornographic of his performances elicits her sincerest declaration of love (quoting *Last Tango?).*

The dialectic of identification and distancing is obviously related to Nancy's alternating roles as patient/object/sign (to whom all these strange events are happening,) and as agent, subject of her own initiative: on the one hand her passive willingness to learn or to wait and see, versus her more aggressive projection of herself as a 'know-all'; sexist victimisation versus active female masochism; display of a touching though misplaced humanism in response to Noblart's last request, versus her confused self-sacrifice against her own feelings; bullied by Jimmy who wants to know whether Alex "defiled" her, but eager to believe that Jimmy had really been in love with her all this time; sensing a tear-stirring romance — "Dont torture yourself, I beg you" — but rejecting his offer to share his couch with him: "No Jimmy ,no... we must wait" and "Only time can heal your wounds"; and finally her projection of herself as one 'whom nothing can shock', while being reduced to tears over the loss of her trousers, stamping her feet in a tantrum and accusing, against her own principles ("one shouldn't judge people too hastily"), the first person she can think of, despite ample evidence of the fallaciousness of her judgment.

The levels on which the clichés are hammered home are multiple and thus prone to reach every possible spectator, constituting those cultural sub-codes Barthes mentions: The Cultured who savour the recognition of the treasures of fine-art and highbrow heritage, so abundantly distributed throughout the villa and caressed by the passing camera, will find the taste turn bitter in their mouths, especially when monitored through their secret games by Nancy's trusting articulation of the 'right answers'; as the Americo-phile, sympathising with the young Yankee 'doing' Europe in the summer, will lose enthusiasm for the portrait she proceeds to create. Yet her basic likability and her charming naiveté are essential for such decomposition to take place, to set in motion a continuous oscillation between sympathy and critical disengagement. We have to recognise our own good values in "One shoudn't judge people too hasily", and our own ingrained Freudianism in "Maybe he had a difficult childhood", to feel the full embarrassment when Nancy applies them. Those who read books themselves understand her readiness to commend *Indirect Sensations* when the cue falls, but wish she didn't reel off the complete reference so insensitively to one who does not share her predilection. Though diaries are supremely private, which secret compiler would not melt to praises like Giovanni's — "it's clear, it's sharp, it's witty... I like it" — and be eager to hear more ("Do you

Mastroianni holding the whip hand



think so?"); yet her susceptibility to flattery in the face of insulting ridicule which makes it possible causes shame, or at least conflict.

Nothing is sacred to this process of decomposition: her diary entries, even though so understandable and familiar, and often expressing our own responses — say, with regard to the priest Pietro: "What's the church coming to?" — reveal the trashiness of their formulation when exposed to our eyes, as do the even more trivial remarks — "The weather is fine", and private recordings — "Dislocated knee getting into lotus position. Meditated a dandelion for an hour and three-quarters". The instance throws more serious reflections on contemporary recording mania in general and illustrates aptly that our language ("le langage courant") shows signs of wearing. Similarly Romance, as it has been in use for too long and become a ready-made configuration of predictable ingredients (a myth, as in Barthes' *Mythologies)*, is mocked repeatedly and on several planes — e.g. the full-moon night on the beach, heavily underlined by appropriately emotional music, — as well as in Nancy's girl's dreams with regard to the one and only topic of Romance, love affairs. At an other time, when Catone's men bring in a huge historical canvas, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (though the house generally favours the modern), Nancy's conditioned response to "a masterpiece!" is expressed in a rhetorical question which, though embarrassing in the usual way of her remarks, would have some validity as a true question: "Shouldn't it be in the museum?" Should it indeed. And isn't Capone's business just as realistic a context for it, so that both mutually beg the question.

Naiveté, however, seems to be the underlying constant to all our embarrassment: the good-will and unrestricted admiration of Young America for Ancient Europe, seat of Culture and History, a Europe, which however we see to have grown old, cynical and decadent ("an old bitch gone in the teeth"). Hence we cannot accept the good-will of a potentially fresher energy towards a guilty lethargy, and are disturbed in our seeing by the blind admiration.

Mr. Noblart, the house-holder, literally keeping the villa together, and from whose achievements and accumulated wealth degenerate epigones draw exlusively — a tycoon of all noble art — is lying on his deathbed and undergoing a Don Quixotian peripathetic discovery that as life is drawing to an end he begins to prefer the real thing to its image, the eating of an apple to contemplating a Cezanne, yet finding it too much when finally he is granted a glimpse of the real. Nancy's entry into her diary reads: "A wonderful old tyrant like Michelangelo's Moses" (yet if learned reference must be, we might rather think of Gerontion.)

As for his descendents: the sublimator Art holds no interest whatsoever; with a blasé indifference they pay masterpieces as much heed as they would any wallpaper on which they wanted their servants to crush a fly. Bacon is known in the context of breakfast only — to that extent the proverbial superiority of the servants' insight into their masters' affairs is aptly reflected by the paradoxical inversion of their ignorance that tops the masters' indifference. Alex, prostitutor of women, senses congenial employment in the mafiose trade of masterpieces. In general, with the refinement and oversophistication of the cultural heritage handed down to them, their sexuality has kept comparable pace to reach exaggeration and preciosity in various different forms: Alex, a drained pimp made redundant, afflicted he claims with lice but more likely with syphilis, and requiring the most eclectic stimulations (e. g. the crunching of a ping pong ball between his toes) in order to ignite his sexual fantasies which themselves rely on copious paraphernalia. Tony, a sex-maniac who cannot finish his dinner before his powerful drive compels him back to bed again, whence Lollipop no longer even arises; Lesbian sunbathers, some of the nudist persuasion, and homosexuals likely to have gone Platonic in the spiritual sense due to a total immunity and indifference to anything carnal. Mosquito's big sting may well be a phallic symbol in a retrograde 'unawakened' child-sexuality, but it is not a metaphor, as the clever (however professedly innocent) were quick to get wrong together with Nancy. And his interest in tennis-shoes, a Well-Known object for fetishism, is far greater and more real than in anything the lovely Nancy has to offer, notwithstanding his aesthetic preference for bottoms over bosoms; but anything harpoonable is good enough for venting unsublimated aggression. The trouble with oral sex, Giovanni is made to realise, is that one doesn't recognise one's partner very well in the dark.

Unlike the silent, though privately verbose, middle-aged majority who are sure that "America is ahead of Europe", our representative of the younger generation, Nancy, proves herself well open and liberal towards the values of another culture which yet, historically, is so much 'her own'. Not only is she adequately equipped with a bourgeois education that is more thoroughly central European and cultural than the real: a grounding in everyman's psychology, academic agility concerning bibliography, she knows her masterpieces and her composers and has had her piano lessons. But the ultimate proof of a humble and absolute orientation towards that European Mecca is offered in her touching faith and optimism that basically all lies before her, that phylogenetic history is ontogenetic future, in that a trip after High- or Graduate school will make it all hers. Such unrestrained optimism is predictably going to over-shoot: the blindness to reality has already been mentioned, but Nancy is moreover impressed and prepared to accept anything and everything Europe has to offer:

"A pimp? Really?... With women?... You took money from them? . . . Did you have many?. ."

And Alex has already practically won her admiring and self-renouncing love, since she wants to play up to anything the Europeans may do.

Thus her very quest for knowledge is severely put into question. The desire on the one hand and its object on the other are exposed in a grandiose gesture that is the film-text *What?*, with the dialectic of all its sub-strata, and which culminates in the pronouncement by the haggard German nurse, who has been fulfilling unsentimentally her duty to tend the dying giant, reading Nietzsche:

"Herr Noblart is tot! Herr Noblart ist tot!"

What? itself is an embodiment of the Nietzschean paradox prophesying the advent of the modern cultured man, passionate hater of culture, when Art will have served its term as the last instance of religion and gone the way of all religions. Just as paradoxical is the watching subject, *sujet clivé,* needing all its sophistication in order to decompose itself in the sophisticated enterprise of whatching *What?* and failing to establish a secure relationship to the film or to any one of its levels — 'reality', the film-maker's attitude or the message, plot character etc — thus unable to situate itself in such a discourse and define itself as *sujet unaire.* And even should the spectator try by an immense effort to suppress all his doubts and objections to the intrinsic contradictions embodied in the heroine, he will find himself finally and irrevocably betrayed by her cry in the end, admitting that she has all along been in the know, party in a conspiracy with 'the film-maker' which leaves out Mastroianni as much as the spectator:

"..... we're in a movie, aren't we? ..... *What?,* that's the name of the movie... Goodbye, my darling! I'll send you a postcard" — making quite sure that even this sudden and ultimate revelation will not stabilise the film at last at a definitive level, since we are unable to determine whether this is Sydne Rome speaking or Nancy, seeing that Alex is unwilling to turn into Mastroianni and give up the game, but on the contrary returns to his cyclically recurring suggestion:

"What would be nice... would be if we could get together quietly some time..... to have tea for example..... today or tomorrow....." Thus traditional dénouement is finally made impossible.

Susanne Kappeler

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What? — "Texte de jouissance: that which leads into abandon, which discomforts (maybe even to the point of a certain *ennui),* which unbalances the historica, cultural psychological foundations of the reader, the consistency of his tastes, his values and memories, and creates a state of crisis in his relationship with language."

We, the spectator —... "an anachronistic subject... that which holds the reins of both pleasure and extasy, for it partakes at the same time and conflictingly in the profound hedonism of all culture... and in the destruction of that culture; ... it is a subject doubly split, and doubly perverse"

R. Barthes, *Plaisir du texte.* p. 25-6.

Aguirre, the Wrath of God

W. Ger. 1972 **Dir** Werner Herzog **Phot** Thomas Mauch, Francisko Joan, Orlando Machievello **Ed** Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus **Mus** Popol Vuh **Cast** Klaus Kinski (Aguirre) Cecilia Riviera (Flores de Aguirre) Ruy Guerra (Pedro de Ursua) Helena Rojo (Inez de Atienza) Del Negro Peter Berling Daniel Ades Armando Polanah Edward Roland **Prod** Werner Herzog Filmproduktion with the Hessischer Rundfunk. 95 mins.

The metaphysical swamp: poetic realism

1560: the Spanish imperialist adventure in full swing: an expedition sent on ahead by Francisco Pizarro down the Amazon river becomes obsessed with finding the fabulous city of El Dorado. Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* is a film of puzzling beauty, and fascinating not least in terms of the questions it poses for the currently popular semiological (code-oriented and in certain respects anti-evaluative) method of film criticism. As is well known, this type of criticism rests on the assumption that cinematic material is structured as a language; that film is a discourse which operates always within the limits of certain 'codes', aware of those limits and concerned to manipulate them in such a way that, although still nominally in force, the conventions are shown, at selected moments, to be contingent. The practise of such criticism involves the isolation and definition of these codes; an examination of their development and interaction in the course of the film; and finally, should the film in question happen to be in the critic's good books, a demonstration of how the movie recuperates itself through a moment or two of *dialectical lucidity* (i.e., frees itself from total complicity with the ideology whose conventions it perpetuates).

The technique possesses certain virtues: it makes possible, for instance, a less complacent ideological rendering of the film than we have been used to in the patient, intelligent elucidations of a Durgnat or a Robin Wood, where despite their evident taste and erudition, one feels that what is lacking is exactly that political self-consciousness that seems to be the mark of modern discourse (it sometimes seems that their very lucidity is the proof of that lack!) Where semiology fails, though (a direct result of its relentlessly analytic origins), is in giving an account of the affective-aesthetic dimension of film; pleasure, when permitted to enter into the discussion at all, creeps in through a Lacanian/Barthesian back door disguised as jouissance, transgression, the shattering of codes. The theory tends to exhibit a disregard for that dimension of pleasure once known as 'aesthetic delight' — and which, in view of the great formal elegance and mastery of Herzog's movies, one might do worse than re-assert.

This is particularly evident in *Aguirre*. Here we require a vocabulary which recognizes the importance of surface: of surface made into an important thematic element — of images whose potency does not so much elucidate the narrative structure as supersede it. Herzog's energy, like Aguirre's, does not proceed towards a goal: or rather, that goal is chimerical, a pretext. With puzzling and perhaps ironical subjectivity he drifts his camera along the river bank or over the impenetrable planes of an Indian's face, the very intensity of certain images seeming to render their narrative context incidental (Aguirre awkwardly clutching his velvet-gowned daughter to his waist; she is dying, but that is not the point of the shot).

It is a film for the eye: by which I mean that it remains consistently and deliberately at the level of the under-interpreted, the opaque, the non-signifying image. Although a work of consummate and impressive intelligence, perhaps the most intelligent of all Herzog's aesthetic decisions in *Aguirre* is that which leads him to sacrifice the historical and moral content of his narrative to the physical intensity of the landscape in which it unfolds, and which repays him with its fabulous oneiric strangeness. This is in distinct contrast to the more typical procedure of exotic or rugged location films, which is to make the vegetable world a silent accessory to the values discussed by the plot. The Amazonian rainforest is presented in *Aguirre* not as an alternative or antithesis to civilization, a procedure whereby the filmmaker brings the unknown within the compass of his discourse taming it into allegory; on the contrary, the visnal resonance of the jungle is left strangely alone, and not translated into the kind of importunate significance one associates with more conventional cinematic approaches to nature.

So the film is not the simple-minded opposition between barbarism and culture that we see, for instance, in movies as different as *The Bridge On The River Kwai, The African Queen,* or *Deliverance*. Herzog's characteristic excellence is rather a refusal of polarity, a delicate suspension of issues which he accomplishes not so much by *writing* it into the film (i.e. by manouevering the plot, or by permitting the characters explicit verbal irony) as by shooting it in; the surface of the film is made to carry this low-keyed irony and directs our attention onto the voluptuous density of nature — a tactic which situates the moral dimension at a kind of degree zero of signification.

This 'frozen' quality of the movie (a spell broken only by the vertiginous final sequence in which Herzog's camera swoops down and circles the desolate raft) characterizes not only the visual surface of *Aguirre,* but its script as well. In the original German, Herzog's scenario is as opaque and grammatically overexplicit as a sentence from Wittgenstein; the language has a lack of nuance, a surplus clarity which de-humanizes it and empties the words the actors speak of

relevance, of connexion with actual objects. *Aguirre* solemnly declares each bank of the river the property of his Habsburg princeling — as he has previously declared the princeling the new King of Spain, and ceremoniously deposed the Emperor *in absentia*. Language appears blandly — or ominously — functional, relies on elaborate conditional constructions to say simple things and rarely includes an adjective or metaphor. Like the beautiful, reticent *mise-en-scène*, it is an instrument of distanciation and arrest (rather than progress or communication), of that enigmatic austerity which is the vehicle of the film's poetry.

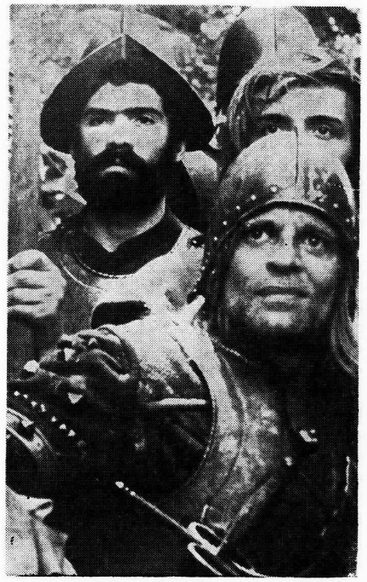
Thus the language of the film, like its images, and in fact like the expedition itself with its chimerical destination, is cut loose from any moral, conceptual or historical mooring: like the raft, it only *drifts*. Similarly with the reed-pipe music of the Indian who accompanies the expedition and whom Aguirre forces to play in moments of tension. The narrative function of these sequences — that is to say, their function as suspense — is undercut by the strange banality of the music itself, recalling that scene in *Fata Morgana* in which a night-club couple perform apparently endless and aimless variations on piano and percussion. In the first of those sequences in *Aguirre*, Herzog holds his camera in a motionles medium shot which has Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) passive and threatening on the left of the frame, and the Indian bobbing up and down as he plays his pipes on the right. As in the scene of the night-club duo, the shot is held much longer than one would expect, and has the effect of neutralizing the narrative which surrounds it in that curious impression of displacement which seems to be the movie's signature.

Clearly, one of the aspects which most draws Herzog's eye is the crazy matter-of-factness of the journey; the ritualized minutiae of a rigid communal life are enforced just as carefully in despatching an expedition to El Dorado as in sending someone off to Cadiz. With a Rossellinian delight in the technicalities, the trivial details which compose the specific substance of life in a distant time and place, Herzog displays the iron stencil through which Pizarro painstakingly inscribes his signature or the crumbling leather folio in which official papers are collected on board Aguirre's raft. This gratuitous pleasure in sheer fact illuminates and poeticizes the film to an extraordinary degree in a way which is altogether characteristic of Herzog's aesthetic.

Yet if in certain respects similar to Rossellini's materialism, Herzog's interest in the texture of history also significantly differs from it. Rossellini seems always drawn to the scene of 'mainstream' history, to crucial moments in the development of the bourgeois state (the consolidation of monarchic centralism under Louis XIV; the triumph of Victor Emmanuel's democratic monarchy and of Italian nationalism in *Viva l'Italia),* whereas Herzog's locations seem always on the margins of history — the Sahara desert in *Fata Morgana,* or in the case of *Aguirre* at the literal boundaries of the known world, a mutinous digression from the route of the main expedition. Rossellini's interest lies in the successful move, the effective character; the pedagogic strain in his aesthetic is satisfied by the opportunity this offers to analyse technological phenomena — the physical object and processes which form the substance of any historical epoch — as, precisely, determined by a vast system of historical cause and effect. The sartorial extravagance of Louis XIV's court in *Le Prise de Pouvoir de Louis Quatorze* is not an arbitrary whim, but an important part of the king's plan to relieve his nobles of excess wealth. Objects are instrumentalized, consistently made the vehicle of, human, historically conscious intent. For Rossellini, objects are exemplary, and ask for analysis in their historical determination. Herzog by contrast is more interested in their autonomous, incidental presence. Where Rossellini uses Louis XIV's lavish meal as an emblem of his real political ascendancy over the nobles who are forced to stand by and watch him consume it, the banquet served to the puppet "King" Guzman in *Aguirre* — broiled fish and quinces while the crew receives its daily ration of a few grains of corn — conversely illustrates the notion of kingship without power, an individual dementia sustained by Aguirre's force of character alone but which has no substance to back it up.

So Herzog's interests appear to be not in the bourgeois-materialist or mainstream reading of history which Rossellini supplies, but in a certain *departure from* history effected by imperious and extraordinary individuals — here, in *Aguirre,* a descent into anarchic fantasy presented exactly as the genesis of a new type of historical reality. In the closing shots, with everyone except Aguirre (wrath of God, author of the ruin which surrounds him) dead or dying, and the raft overrun by hundreds of chattering monkeys,

Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) and followers



he declaims to a monkey imprisoned in his fist his intention of founding in El Dorado a new dynasty of heroes, descendants of the incestuous union between himself and his daughter. This treacherous version of history (signalled explicitly: "I am the great traitor") doesn't seem to be the subject of Herzog's irony as it might have been, but the occasion of a lyrical homage by the filmmaker to the purity and tenacity of his hero's vision: which is the point of the exultant motion of Herzog's final shot as the camera swoops down and circles the raft with such liberating force and elegance.

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These remarks which emphasise the unusual, low-keyed structure of Herzog's film and its puzzling digressions aren't meant to minimise the fact that in other ways the narrative structure of *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* operates directly enough: this is to say, it functions with the kind of aesthetic economy which is the characteristic feature of "classic" Hollywood. For instance, one often finds that the opening shots of American pictures of the 30's and 40's possess the kind of clarity and directness which lifts the story from its immediate origins and transforms the postulates of the plot into something altogether more abstract and metaphorical. The spare precision of the opening sequence of Walsh's *High Sierra* for example (at random), which has the sole purpose of establishing in the shortest possible length of time the background leading up to the drama we are about to watch, becomes by a paradoxical process the secret of the movie's dramatic reflections on such "abstract" issues as individual freedom and constraint. The still shot of the mountain peak over which the credits unfold establishes the High Sierras as the goal of Humphrey Bogart's quest in such a sensible and "overdetermined" way that it somehow fulfils *more* than its narrative purpose; just as a few seconds later, the stylized and economical manner in which Walsh shoots Bogart's stroll in the park on his release from jail, manages to make the sun streaming through the trees throw shadows which mimic the bars of the prison cell, and which further engulf the story in an aura of fatality. So in *Aguirre* the magnificent opening shot of the expedition strung out vertically in line as it descends the hill, "held" and distanced as it is by the etherial choir music on the sound track (Popol Vuh), not only places the expedition in its narrative context — a historical inventory which introduces the cast of warriors, noble ladies, slaves, baggage animals etc. — but also in its "metaphysical" or poetic context, poised in its strange displaced way, picking its way in single file across the alien terrain in a weirdly automonous purposiveness. The *waywardness* of this essentially linear model like the river with its curves and bends and hidden dangers, is a metaphor for Herzog's idiosyncratic use of narrative, which never quite drops Hollywood's goal-oriented dynamics, but never quite confirms them either.

Andrea Simon

Nada

France/Italy 1974 **Dir** Claude Chabrol **Sc** Jean-Patrick Manchette **Phot** Jean Rabier **Ed** Jacques Gaillard **Art Dir** Guy Littaye **Set Dec** Henri Berger **Mus** Pierre Jansen **Cast** Fabio Testi (Buenaventura Diaz) Michel Duchaussoy (Marcel Treuffais) Maurice Gerrel (Andre Epaulard) Michel Aumont (Goemond) Lou Castel (D'Arey) Didier Kaminka (Meyer) Lyle Joyce (Ambassador) Mariangela Melato (Veronique Cash) Jean-Lois Maury (Minister's Secretary) with Vivianne Romance Andre Falcon Katia Romanoff **Prod** Films de la Boetie (Paris)/Verona Film (Rome) by Andre Genoves 134 mins.

In contrast to the decors of his movies, the excellence of Chabrol's cinema has always resided in its being a cinema of bad taste. This has something to do with a generally malicious and sardonic treatment of supposedly edifying subject matter. The joke is good and it still takes in critics. At any event, *Nada* is simply one of Chabrol's best films to date. It is fitting that a filmmaker so interested in the interaction of ethics and elegance — mutually supporting attributes to the extent that one is never quite sure which *comes first* — should finally choose to portray that most intransigent of all types of dandy, the professional revolutionary. Yet unlike the late Jean-Pierre Melville whose tough guys are also in their own way exquisites, which does not, however, prevent the drama from being played straight, Chabrol gives evidence of wanting to treat his theme in most respects with irony. I say in most respects, because it is exactly the way in which *Nada* is *not* ironical which provides the viewer's difficulty. Meanwhile, the irony, as always in Chabrol, manifests itself as an excess of sign. This is immediately apparent in the figure of the leading member of the anarchist group which gives the film its title, Buenaventure Diaz, as played by Fabio Testi. Testi brings an admirable and farcical solemnity to the act of dressing up in full anarchist regalia (black scarf and sombrero etc.) for forays into the Latin Quarter where he will be confronted with nothing more dangerous than a plain-clothes policeman demanding to see his papers (his identity card, in another nice touch, describes him as a musician), or the concierge's husband asking him to keep the noise down. This "overdetermination" of appearances at the expense of substance (a possible definition of irony) and which takes the form of a concern with dress, extends to the scene at the end of the film where having escaped from the farmhouse where the group have been in a combined police and military bombardment, Diaz breaks into the deserted weekend cottage. Here he showers, tends his wounds and doesn't omit to help himself to one of his absent host's *handsome white polo-neck sweaters* — this as a prelude to working out the details of his final showdown with the police chief Goemond (Michel Aumont). The scene is a paradigm of revolutionary narcissism, played here as throughout by Testi with a totally convincing insolence.

With Epaulard (Maurice Garrel), the professional whom the group engage to help carry out their kidnapping operation, the dandyism lies not so much in his clothes (although his light tropical suits and dark blue sports shirts have their own shabby distinctiveness) as the fact that his whole bruised, tough, sympathetic persona — he even has a slight facial tic — corresponds almost too perfectly to a certain archetype of the screen professional so that it unwittingly becomes a parody. For the girl in the group, Veronique (Mariangela Melato), it becomes a pqestion of what he *should* look like rather than what he is (significantly, she thinks he looks like the novelist Roger Vailland). Finally, in the intellectual leader of the group, Treuffais (Michel Duchaussoy), the dandyism resides not just in a certain life-style defined in his unusual furniture and appartment which I shall return to, but more specifically in his occupation, as a teacher of philosophy in a smug and well-heeled boy's school. As in Hitchcock, mention of ethics never serves the purpose it looks as if it should. In the American cinema narrative looks after ethics, in the sense that the dynamics of plot always exteriorise inner psychological conflict, so that where ethical possibilities are discussed openly they operate a different, probably ironical, code. In contrast to the lack of verbal explanation for even the most violent actions in a standard Hollywood genre film — the western, say — where that silence is in some degree a guarantee of the act's integrity, lengthy disquisitions on ethical questions function either to warn us that the characters involved are guilty of a prissy and compunctious intellectualism, or, as more frequently in Chabrol's anti-Christian satires *(Ten Day's Wonder, The Rupture, The Beast Must Die)*, to undermine the whole basis of morality which the action rests on. This is the opposite of the American cinema which is a cinema not about choice, but about will — measured in gesture and action. Thus, to talk about ethics is a sign that they are already being relativised, or rather, that they are being *aestheticised.*

Even in the case where traditional ethics are rejected, as when Treuffais throws in his job at the Lycee as a prelude to be kidnapping, the alternative code he adopts is presented in such an extreme antinomian form as to function as yet another excess of sign. This is the significance of the literally gratuitous violence in the scene where Treuffais attacks the motorcyclist after his car has stalled at the traffic lights; or the contemptuous dismissal, just falling short of physical violence, of the bearded student who knocks on his door collecting funds. In different ways Chabrol makes this the characteristic, the distinctive, dandyism of the two remaining members of the group — the world of the waiter Meyer (Didier Kaminka) being revealed in the solipsistic child's drawing his mad wife presents him with to make up a quarrel; while D'Arey's (Lou Castel) alcoholism furnish him in the breakfast scene in the farmhouse with the necessary courage to damm everybody, including his companions in the conspiracy, with a reckless bravado. This is of course a conceptual pun on the meaning of "anarchism", just as in *Le Boucher* (1971) Jean Yanne's occupation (a butcher) is too obviously linked to his *secret* occupation (a murderer) for the effect not to be something more than ironical.

Another way of saying that Chabrol is interested in dandyism is to say that he is concerned in his films with the morality of role-playing. He consistently undermines his characters by suggesting a certain contingency or lack of necessity in the part of the drama they find themselves caught up in, all the more so in that they seem to fit their roles so well — which is only to say that they fit them too well. This is primarily a literary preoccupation, and in *Nada,* sure enough, Inspector Goemond mistakes the red and black anarchist insignia of a book he has seized from Diaz's flat for the more celebrated "Le Rouge et le Noir", written by an author whom the eccentric and scurrilous *béyliste* Paul Léautaud reminds us had 179 aliases. Role-playing, then functions as irony and distance: this is one way of enabling one's fictions to avoid the complicity of tragedy, if that is how one judges tragedy, to operate. Where Bergman in *Persona* uses the myth of *Elektra* to ratify the statement he is offering about the spiritual malaise of his time, Chabrol in *Les Noces Rouges* (1973) uses the Oresteia of Aeschylus precisely to *subvert* whatever claims to tragic nobility his pair of doomed lovers — those middle-aged ironists Michel Piccoli and Stephane Audran — may possess: thus, if they have any claims on our sympathy, the uniqueness of their case is belittled by it paralleling so obviously other more ancient, more momentous occasions. The end result — and this is arguably a potentially more authentic response for a modern sensibility — is closer to farce than to tragedy.

It is not hard to see that *Nada* abounds with such elements at all levels. It is there in the writing of the two clowns, Dominique Zardi and Henri Attal, from earlier Chabrol movies into the script as the assistants of the police chief Goémond, and later as the sadistic, unintelligent tortures of the arrested Treuffais. Goémond's relationship with the Minister's ice-cool Private Secretary (Jean-Louis Maury) and with Madame Gabriele (Viviane Romance), keeper of the brothel from which the American ambassador is to be ambushed, are played as splendid, sardonic comedy, as part of the complicated choreography of how the characters adjust their roles to the reigning predicament (Goémond is an animal to his inferiors and captives, a cringing, inarticulate butt to the scorn of the minister's man) — so delicately and accurately observed as to make the movie a comedy of manners, or as always in Chabrol, a class comedy. Farce is ineptitude in another guise, and the bungled attempts of the French government to cover up the "irregularities" of the farmhouse siege (where no quarter was given) reinforce a level of confusion and error which, too, is unconducive to the lucidity of tragedy. Remembering how important violence is as a metaphor of authenticity in the American cinema, one can report that in *Nada* even the scenes of violence do not escape irony if, to take an example, the killing outside the brothel of a police motor-cycle rider *by a catapult* is anything to go by. The policeman's head, goggle-eyed with surprise, fills up the bulk of the screen: suddenly from the centre of his forehead blood jets out in a profuse cascade. This is the very opposite of those authentic, "accidentally photographed" mimes of death we are used to from Rossellini and post-war neo-realism. In Chabrol, like Peckinpah, there is a poised balletic choreography of death, something ritualistic and stage-like, where the quantities of blood split only serve to reinforce how essentially theatrical the conception really is.

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Or nearly always. It is important to make this distinction. There is an inherent ambivalence about the portrayal of violence which suggests that it must always be a focal point in measuring how ambiguous, how metaphorical is the status of a particular discourse. Violence can serve, as I think Chabrol sometimes makes it, as a distancing device, something rhetorical or theatrical, in the end something not much more than punctuation. But at the same time it is in the nature of its portrayal to exert a strong identificational pull. In *Nada* this involves a certain overall plausibility in the plot and in the treatment. The cinema does what the theatre cannot and that is offer the subject of violence not as some abstract discourse (in such conjunctures as "The Theatre of Cruelty", where the humanism it hopes to repudiate is recuperated in what inevitably becomes a statement about the "human condition" — see for instance the plays of Edward Bond); but rather as it erupts in a specifically imagined set of circumstances which after all might be about other things as well; that is to say where the importunity of violence as subject matter (capital letters, signalling importance, concern, weightiness of the issue etc.) does not succeed in swamping the question of verisimilitude. Violence is seen to arise *out of the story* rather than being imposed from without as some portentous problem. Apart from handful of films where it has been dealt with by critics out of context *(The Wild Bunch, Straw Dogs, A Clockwork Orange)*, violence in the cinema is not at root controversial, as it deliberately is in the theatre. Which is to say once more that it is subordinate to the demands of the plot, to, finally, a certain realism.

Chabrol in *Nada* uses this dual status of violence rather well. It *can* be used theatrically as in the instance I referred to earlier. Yet the siege of the farmhouse does not leave one with this impression — even if the initial casualty (a policeman shot in the forehead) mimics the previous violence outside the brothel and introduces a suspicious note of symmetry into the supposedly haphazard and contingent schedule of death. The subsequent gunbattle however leaves all this behind in the convincingly detailed way Chabrol depicts the group disintegrate — psychologically, morally, physically — under the prolonged bombardment. The deaths of Epaulard, Veronique and Meyer are superbly articulated and here if nowhere else not primarily theatrical. It is as if the blank backdrops which, on the stage, stand for an abstract area in which the notion of cruelty can be explored had been filled in by a mass of interesting details. Chabrol *renders* his film masterfully. The advantages are all his: to deprive a text of its abstract and exemplary status is to go a long way towards purging it of secondhand literary attributes (of which the "humanism" of the Bond plays is the ideological residuum). Chabrol instinctively uses what the cinema offers to construct an interrogation of violence not dependent for its truth on verbal ratification of the kind provided in drama by delivered lines and set speeches. His use of decor and setting, for instance, literally fills in those virgin backcloths of the stage with a wealth of contradictory signs which taken together give the film its compelling idiosyncrasy. The audience is forced to puzzle out the rights and wrongs of the group's most vociferously anti-bourgeois theorist Treuffais living in a spacious, austere panelled apartment with all the trappings of good taste: as similarly, the poujadiste petit-bourgeois police inspector Goemond living in a chrome and leather studded apartment which looks as if it had been furnished indiscriminately from a mail order catalogue sent out by one of the more advanced firms of Milanese interior decorators.

This is the malicious and clairvoyant eye for detail of a Hitchcock. Its payoff is *complexity*, which where it becomes a moral complexity takes us back to the problem of characterization. If the characters in the movie because of their theatrical and overdetermined presentation are in one sense puppets, the intensity of conviction with which they are played as the film unfolds unwittingly draws the audience into a concern with their destiny; (thus, to continue the comparison between the stage and cinema, it is perhaps a measure of the latter's strength that it manages to use different levels of acting and verisimilitude *within the same discourse,* whereas the stage, having chosen its "style" of acting is condemned to follow it through consistently to the end. In fact one is tempted to say that acting is only ever a problem on the stage, since the theatre lacks film's prodigious ability to *place* acting either by rhythm, editing or variation of shot distance, or to dispense with acting altogether for limited periods as the camera turns itself loose onto the world). In *Nada,* the contradictory status of characterization — a conceptual theatricality undercut by the professional intensity brought to the playing — initiates a complicated set of allegiances. The whole thing is extremely neat. By taking in the first place as subject matter a group of anarchists, Chabrol does everything he can to ensure that he is dealing with a system of values as far as possible removed from the norms and expectations of the audience (the bourgeois audience, as it might be characterized elesewhere). He then proceeds by a series of cunning narrative manoeuvres and deftly placed gratifications to make the audience identify with a group dedicated, after all, with a certain intransigence, to its (the audience's) destruction.

Part of the problem is that we simply get to know them — better, at any rate, than the television news service which after the raid consistently mis-identifies the group, so that we feel an urge to *put them right.* Scrutinized closely — the cinema's privilege — the group reveal unexpected personal attributes and tendernesses. It turns out, for instance, that for all his mastery and self-confidence in other fields, Diaz has not been able to persuade Veronique to sleep with him, although it is implied that he wants to. After some initial sparring, Veronique accepts Epaulard as her lover instead; in the build up to this there is a scene where they drive to Paris at night to post the manifesto announcing the kidnapping. In order to get back they must pass a police road-block which entails them acting as if they were a married couple. The enforced contiguity — perhaps no more than mildly erotic — coupled with the suspence of the police stopping them acts as a typical device for putting *us* in their position, as if to tempt us to forget the moral alternatives thrown up by rigorously following through their ideological stand. Similarly, the violent truculence of Treuffais becomes a positive courage under the brutality inflicted by Goemond and his gang (strange moment where shackled to the radiator within Goemond's kicking distance, he breaks into a defiantly mis-sung version of Blake's "The Sick Rose"). Treuffais's doubts about the kidnapping enterprise, which lead to his withdrawing from the plans, retrospectively soften the moral self-righteousness or the group, introducing a certain ambiguity of motive which the audience seizes upon to *make allowances.* The scene in the car with Epaulard and Veronique is paralleled by the scene in which Diaz and D'Arey break out of the farmhouse in a suicide dash for safety. Here the interspersed cutting of shots from the outside — including aerial shots which show us the disposition of the police and by extension give us the odds, so to speak, on their succeeding — with subjectively plotted camera shots

from the inside of the car signalling their determination, provides an obvious, classical instance in the film of encouraging audience identification.

The models for this procedure are to be found in the American cinema, to whose traditions and protocols Chabrol is obviously indebted (as which commercial filmmaker is not?). As in any number of Hitchcock movies, the moral complicity of the audience with the actions portrayed on screen is revealed in all its uneasiness when we are vicariously invited to judge violence — or to administer it. The complicated series of revenges in *Nada* gives Chabrol's desire to play on this uneasiness full scope. Against the killing of the Ambassador by Diaz, we are forced to place Goemond's shooting of the girl in cold blood (a close-up of her eyes distended in surprise accuses us, the audience, of this mean satisfaction); similarly, Goemond's casual cruelty to the dying Epaulard — he crushes him in the ribs as Epualard lies paralysed with a broken back — demands to be set against the fact that for his revenge, Diaz carefully saws off the barrels of a shotgun to make his opponent's death even more brutal. The result of this meticulous — and malicious — balancing of sympathies emerges as a highly abstract discourse about distance and involvement which might be characterised precisely as on investigation of the morality of spectacle. As if to make the point quite explicit, Chabrol provides a twist to the scene of the kidnapping of the ambassador. It turns out that the brothel has been under surveillance by the police for some time, and we are shown an agent filming the group as they arrive from an upstairs window across the street. When events take a turn for the worse — motorcycle police turn up on the scene as the group are making their getaway and there is a short fracas during which D'Arey kills one of them with his catapult — the agent far from doing anything to help his injured collegues, sits back and rubs his hands with amusement before biting into his evening sandwich. Like Godard in his films of the 60's *(Masculin-Feminin* notably), Chabrol poses the aesthetic problems which interest him — above all, problems of *engagement* and *holding off* — in terms of an elegant and extended visual joke.

This seems to me a possible way of making a political film. It is not the only way of course. Godard — since he has been cited — in a film like *La Chinoise* (1967), a film which has certain similarities of subject matter with *Nada,* uses a whole battery of devices — stills, titling, cinema-verite style interviews, an aleatory fragmentation of narrative etc. — to provide a multiplicity of perspective unavailable to what is characterised as the "flawless realism" of the commercial cinema. (One might contrast the way Chabrol and Godard deal with the member of the group who falls out: the status of Treuffais's apologia is determined by its being chanelled straight back into the plot, whereas the scepticism of Henry (Michel Semeniako) in Godard's film functions — like Anna Wiazemsky's interview with Francis Jeanson — to situate his comments not only inside but outside the aesthetic boundaries of the film. We are excused from agreeing or disagreeing with Treuffais's politics, whereas Henry's comments seem to be deprived of an essential layer of fiction and must be answered directly; significantly, half the characters in *La Chinoise* keep their own names.) The commercial cinema, to which, for the sake of argument Chabrol belongs, and against which, equally, Godard in a film like *La Chinoise* is making a stand, is forced to deal with political issues as moral dramas, to the annoyance of doctrinaire critics of the left. It is arguable that if this is the case, it is necessary to infuse the complicated strands of the plot with something of the vigour, the guile and the obliqueness of Chabrol or Hitchcock. It is at *this* level that the film may be said to operate politically, rather than at the level of simply possessing a "political" subject matter like that of Costa-Gavras in *Z* or *State of Siege.* In fact, as it stands the choice of subject is relatively unimportant, which only adds an extra level of irony (as a kind of gleeful *opportunity for misunderstanding)* to certain films — Hitchcock's *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain, Losey's Assasination of Trotsky, Nada* itself among them — which happen to be about the confrontation of contemporary political ideologies. The priorities of the matter are such that a film must work as art before it can work as politics — that is, if it wishes to last. Otherwise one is left with such liberal statements of allegiance as *State of Siege,* artistically banal, serving no other purpose than a gesture of solidarity — which, it is only fair to add, may after all have its place somewhere.

Of course, this is to put a certain value on the lastingness of a work of art which it is not necessary to subscribe to. There are strong arguments in favour of the position that art should be provisional, strategic — and useful. In this perspective subtlety itself is no longer the self-evident virtue it was. There is a polemical directness in this type of political art which, as a by-product, preempts and dismisses the kind of criticism which sees itself as impartial and elucidatory. One suspects that in Brecht, for instance, criticism is deflected in the forceful transparent lucidity of the plays themselves. But then the drama must posses the strong qualities of simplicity rather than the weak and evasive ones. What is at stake is the notion of a political intelligence which has enough strength not to fub aesthetic issues. One feels in *State of Siege* that the failure of lucidity lies between intention and effect: Costa-Gavras *meant* to do one thing and ended up doing something different. A potentially interesting political confrontation between two sides becomes a dull moral confrontation between two individuals, and dull because all the elements of the equation are *given,* — residing, if one likes, in the very faces of the opponents Yves Montand and Jean-Luc Bideau. Such *desinvolture* becomes carelessness. Costa-Gavras is caught between endorsing the morals of his protagonists and qualifying them. The qualifications are not those of irony but of uneasiness. *State of Siege* in the end lacks simply the confidence of all good art, including Chabrol's.

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What does it mean to talk about the "flawless realism" of a film by Chabrol? The camerawork — by Jean Rabier — and the art work — by Guy Littaye and Henry Berger — are responsible for an immaculacy that, as in the later films of Bunuel, is itself problematic. Chabrol dislocates everything except the imperturbable suavity of his camera, which continues to efface itself into transparency while converting everything it gazes upon into something beautiful. This is the legacy of Hollywood — Hollywood's professionalism — but it also of course inevitably expresses an ideological position. There are some for whom Chabrol's elegance leaves him open to changes of bad faith, so that the question about flairless realism could be rephrased to ask, what does it mean, what political obtuseness does it imply, to continue making films now in the way that Hollywood, or Hitchcock, was making films fifteen years ago? This seems to me a hostile but a pertinent question especially when couched in the sophicated rhetoric of the marxist-leninist *débat.* It is probably not something that can be answered outside the specific political argument in which it is formulated, but one or two points can be made. *Nada* is taken from a novel by Jean-Patrick Manchette, and thus places itself within the tradition of run-of-the-mill Hollywood adaptations, in contrast to the premium placed on originality which with a few exceptions (for example Joseph Losey) is the distinctive mark of the European art cinema. Chabrol's preference, however, works all to his advantage, in the sense that he seems to grasp instinctively the strengths of a certain tradition of *anonymity,* in contrast to the always threatening and portentous gravity of the European director's personal "statement" (Bergman, Antonioni). Where European directors approach each film as its own exercise in form, Chabrol has long felt at ease within the constraints of genre — bastardised certainly, by nonetheless providing a vocabulary of known narrative ruses. In sum, there is an interesting play in Chabrol between the notion of an intellectual, auteur-oriented cinema and a more popular, impersonal and commercial tradition. In the pull of these forces the status of films — like Bunuel's — remains ambiguous, ironic and hard to pin down, all of which finally has its own polemical value. This elusiveness, to get back to Chabrol's literary preoccupations, is one of the rewards of a romanesque temperament. For such an exercise in strategy and style, the odd thing is that *Nada* should be in many ways so passionate. Yet there are superb shots — the palace suddenly illuminated against the night sky, the wheat field swirling in the wind after the car crash — which suggest that as in Hitchcock a classical, cerebral mise-en-scene does not preclude a liking for resonant emotional passages.

Mark Le Fanu

An interview with Dusan Makavejev

Floating the ark: but the cities remain standing

The interview published here was written for the 19th Pula Film Festival in August 1972. The interview itself and the review by Lorenzo Codelli which follows it wittily and obliquely take up some of the points made earlier in this issue; notably the extent to which a certain type of cinematic spectacle possesses the overriding value of baffling the spectator's desire for clear-cut meaning. Codelli juggles with the notion of "message" in Sweet Movie *(or* Sweet Doom,*) but it is only to illustrate an elliptical, fragmented field of possibilities in Makavejev's film, (against which he places the more monolithically ideological exordium of current Hollywood: "We must build".) The obliqueness and wit of the two articles are, like the formal attributes of the movies that are talked about, a function of rapid movement and juxtaposition. The notion of "play" which this entails has been held against Makavejev in the past — notably in* WR: Mysteries of the Organism *— as evidence of "irresponsibility" (the desire always to know where a film stands on such and such a topic), but it is in reality no more than the cinema has always offered. The immemorial components of eroticism and violence (and in particular, eroticism in violence) are always there to contradict the message which may importunately have survived the early stages during which the movie was planned and sketched out. Once more the visual, gestural, phatic emphasis of the completed movie serves to undermine whatever original and paraphrasable purpose it may have once possessed. Makavejev, in the interview, has a mass of opinions, but the blitheness and gaiety with which they are thrown out and bounce off each other suggests a metaphorical and "hesitated" reading of their literalness. Makavejev's is an irony which protects the fact that like any artist worth bothering about his opinions are experimental and provisional. So much is obvious enough. Spectacle in his hand is the instument par excellence of combatting dogma (hence his brilliant and subversive use of propaganda footage). But equally to the point, his movies throw into relief a "reading" of cinema, almost a sociology of cinema, that* Monogram *has always been interested in. It is the sense in which, defined as* popular culture, *cinema invokes the spectre of manipulation, voyeurism, market demand, "fantasy." A simultaneous* mistrust *of its power, and* endorsement *of its subversive value in unlocking chained up fantasies hovers round the question of whether the cinema is a progressive art. The subject matter of Makavejev's movies stretching right back into the thirties is coterminous with the whole history of cinema's ideological complicity as a "mass medium". Against the strident denouncements of cinema that one finds in Adorno and Benjamin, and residually in the scepticism of Bertolt Brecht, one might provisionally place a more egregious* exploration *of its effects in the work of Reich and Makavejev. Finally, Codelli's brief article is exemplary in dealing with a less auteur-oriented Hollywood than one is used to in these pages — notably the blockbusting "disaster" movies of recent months, whose aesthetic and ideological manoeuvres are contrasted to Makavejev in a number of interesting ways.* Sweet Movie, *incidentally, according to our lates information has still to find a distributor here.*

— DURING THE LAST YEAR OR SO, YOUR FILM *WR — THE MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM* COMPETED UNDER THE YUGOSLAV FLAG AT 12 WORLD FESTIVALS.

DO YOU NOW FEEL LIKE A CHAMPION PLAYER WHO IS SITTING IT OUT BEHIND THE TOUCHLINES?

— When you play a dirty game, you must take time out once in a while.

— WHAT IS THE LOWDOWN ON YOUR NEW PROJECT?

— The name — A SWEET MOVIE; genre — erotic comedy with a slight off-flavour of anti-psychiatry; starring in principal roles — Milena Dravic; the idea, scenario, screenplay, editing, direction, additional dialogues — Dusan Makavejev; producer — DUNAV FILM, headed by director Vicko

Raspor; executive production — a dynamic group within DUNAV FILM, led by Aca Stojanović and Dejan Djurković; assistant -director Bojana Marjan-Makavejev; shooting is done mostly in Yugoslavia and a little elsewhere, too, it all depends; the advertising slogan — TRY ME, I'M DELICIOUS!; filming to begin at the end of September 1972; the first sound copy — middle of 1973; the world premiere — May 1973, Cannes.

— PLEASE EXPLAIN THE "EROTIC COMEDY". AREN'T ALL YOUR FILMS EROTIC, AND AREN'T YOU ALREADY TIRED OF COMEDY?

— Do you remember that beautiful old Ukrainian man in Dovzhenkov's *The Earth,* lying on a magnificent bed of apples? He eats an apple and dies. I suppose Eros is something juicy, something to do with life.

— I have an impression that comedy happens somehow by itself, it comes unbid. Even now, look what I have inadvertently stepped into. I happened to mention the Ukrainian old man, and there I notch one up for Veljko Bulajić who at the time of the mass movement used to spread the "reliable" report about me to the effect that I was a Ukrainian Jew, (supposed to be known for their anti-communism.) So that's just my luck; I go for apples and I come up with a rotten one... Do you remember Charlie Chaplin happily rolling blindfolded on his roller skates along the edge of a precipice?

THIS LOOKS MORE LIKE PSYCHIATRY THAN COMEDY.

— That's what I mean by "with a slight off-flavour..." The English psychiatrist, Ron Laing, says that our civilization represses not only our instincts and sexuality but also *"every possible form of transcendence"*. Men with an experience of other dimensions, says Laing, constantly risk being destroyed or are forced to deny themselves. Here he does not only mean lunatics but also poets, inventors, visionaries of all types. Let's not think that it only happens somewhere else, where a union of writers passes a pistol to Mayakovski. We, too, have planted that tree for Branko Miljković in Zagreb[1]).

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"In the context of the present day madness, which imbues everything and which we describe as normality, health, freedom, whatever we call on becomes ambiguous and uncertain." — Ronald Laing.

It is easy for us to say that people in London must think that way, because look at all the things they do to the Irish in the name of their Queen and democracy.

However, I don't want to jump to any conclusions. Miljković, so sensitive to a "Very strong word", instead of having the dialogue with the tree could well have gone to have a glass of beer; Mayakovski could well have become a children's writer, or a writer of encyclopeadic historical novels like so many others. I am on the side of life, which, as we know, in each case lasts until the dying day. I love to see people waxing enthusiastic and nostalgic about *Bonnie and Clyde* while at the same time calling for the death penalty against similar young and savage outlaws operating among ourselves.

The latest hit in Atelje 212 is *The Wounded Eagle,* in which young Petrović, Ckalja's son, plays the love-smitten airforce officer, and everyone is rolling in the aisles with laughter while at the same time my practically closest neighbour airforce officer Desimir Kojić, makes a bloody massacre of his wife, child and mother-in-law... How to piece together the broken fragments of the *same* picture? When crowds pushed in fascination to see Sefka[2] and dozens of women started dreaming about marrying Nail[3] strange and irrational energies were released, and they are certainly worth looking into. Remember also the amazing story that Sefka and Nail were going to get married! It is about things of this kind in this country that books are printed, poems are written and records mass produced, but our pigeon-breasted academic culture hardly notices this creativeness, these public prayers, these grandiose projections of human needs and dreams!

*

— DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT WE ARE OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE PEOPLE?

— Look here, have you heard the hit song (now banned) about the death of the Bulgarian football players, or another best selling hit record, "Boy, Am I stupid"? (I met the writer of this song at Morko Klarin's wedding in the Jugoslavija Hotel.)

In most of our films we have no stupid, no jealous, no hungry nor indeed happy people. People don't try very hard, don't kill themselves, they just sit around tables and talk. It does not pay to be concrete. Look at the ending of Vuk Babi's film *The Burden.* Its conclusion is — it is better not to buy a motorbike.

— WHOM WILL YOU BE ATTACKING IN A SWEET MOVIE?

— SWEET MOVIE will expect the audiences to exercise and sharpen certain senses which are rather seldom used. In this respect it usefully promotes the programme of all-national defence, because it makes people prepared.

— WHY IS YOUR PROJECT LIKENED TO SWEET AND SOUR PORK?

— Because the combination of apparently disparate elements is a culinary art which we intend to follow respectfully in our film.

— WALKING ON A TIGHTROPE AS A HOBBY?

— For many people, to do anything odd is to leap into the void. I hope to make a film that will be a manual for leaping into abysses, spaces beyond our familiar ken. Why should we only experience strange things in our dreams? A SWEET MOVIE will not be afraid of looking like a dream and will permit itself many oddities. It hopes to fling you from horror into joy and then again, quite unexpectedly to jerk tears out of you.

— WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY STARRING MILENA "IN LEADING ROLES"?

— SWEET MOVIE will use the models of *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* developing them in the direction of all life pleasures.

— SO YOU WILL BE MAKING FUN OF THE CLASSICS?

— When Eve White and Eve Black, to use the actual instance, begin with terrible headaches to fuse into a new personality named Jane, this reintegration and this civic peace are truly pathetic, producing a cute, Peyton Place Frankenstein. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (do you remember the superb Frederick March growing hirsute before our very eyes, his teeth protruding out of his lecherously drooling mouth?) have more healthy evil and life in them, but the poor beggars lack humour. Bourgeois literature's eros about the emergence of a new man is all too tenebrous, chilly, scared. Everything is tense, feverish, doomed in a Faustian manner; the scenarist's main preoccupation is how to produce real thunder and to conceal a false moustache. In other words a transfusion of humour into the diseased arteries of classicism.

— IT LOOKS AS IF THE FILM WILL BE NON-POLITICAL?

— As non-political as a glass of milk, as an orange, as summer shit studded with cherry pips. All these are political events.

Whether they are of a special social significance is quite another question.

— DOES THIS MEAN THAT MILENA PLAYS A SCHIZOPHRENIC?

— Milena's role in this film is exceptionally difficult and satisfying. There would be no charm at all if we were to pin a label to her behaviour, and diagnose it as schizophrenic, paranoic, manic-obsessive or some other behaviour. The diagnosis of the character played by Milena is — absolute normality. Milena's job is to create three possible personages which unexpectedly, but not without an internal logic, melt into one another, then into a third, then back again into the first, always at random and always highly convincingly, horrifyingly or amusingly, depending on what conditions we are dealing with.

We shall make use of all the possible clinical knowledge and experience, but always with the basic idea that the pathological picture in question is that of normalcy.

— DOES THIS MEAN THAT THE PATHOLOGY OF NORMALITY IS TO BE CONDEMNED IN YOUR FILM?

— On the contrary, it will be forgiven, for it knows not what it does.

— HOW ARE MILENA'S CHARACTERS NAMED?

— Ruby Goldigger, a high-society lady, or more accurately, a high-class harlot, who lives a life of luxury as a confidence trickster and smuggler. Her lumpen-proletarian alter-ego (or alter-id, or perhaps alter-super-ego), Ethyl Barfly, nicknamed Luxemburg, is a declassée alcoholic and profligate, whose origins nobody knows. She is often seen at Zmaiko's bar and around the railway station. Whenever she gets into trouble with the law, her mysterious protector, Sweet Dickie Mytipric takes her in his Citroen-Maserati to Jasmin House of Beauty, where she gets a perfumed bubble bath and changes her cosmetic and spiritual looks. Anesthesia Blank-Blank, an anonymous non-person, lost in the corridors of the Laza Lazarević mental hospital, receives all the best medicines in the world, but her contact with the outside world is interrupted until her encounter with her healer, Dr. Marcus Herbert, the creative antipsychiatrist, who with his special method provokes an explosion of health.

— WHAT IS HER REAL NAME?

— It hasn't been decided yet.

— WHAT IS SO ENJOYABLE ABOUT A SWEET MOVIE?

— It is *music* to the tongue and a *juicy treat* to the eyes.

— WILL YOU ENTER IT AT THE NEXT PULA FILM FESTIVAL?

— I have been informed that secret talks are under way among sane forces for the final liquidation of Yugoslav film. Instead of an unnecessary Yugoslav film review, next year's Pula will present an edyfying retrospective of two stars: Liubov Orlova and Shirley Temple.

I am looking forward to seeing this programme.

is there life on earth? makavejev's phantoms of liberty

Carole Laure in Sweet Movie

"Do you remember Charlie Chaplin happily rolling blindfolded on his roller skates along the edge of a precipice?" These words of Makavejev contain more or less the essence of *Sweet Movie*. The reference to Chaplin and to *Modern Times* is illuminating: Chaplin is scandalous in that film because he manages to amuse himself, and us, while he is working. The place of work, the assembly line, the restaurant, the department store, all are transformed into stages where games are played, and which subvert their social functions. Precipices are dear to Chaplin, who inherited them from Sennett: the greater the danger, the more comic the situation becomes. In the house which slides into the ravine in *The Gold Rush*, the danger compresses into a few feverish minutes almost the entire history of mankind, or rather its entire struggle for survival. The ship in *Sweet Movie* is called "Survival", and sails over waters which are almost too calm.

It would be difficult to image the disasters or threats of disaster of *The Poseidon Adventure, Juggernaut* or other films of catastrophe happening on the "Survival". The former films tend to place man in competition with the machines which he has made; to stave off disaster or survive it is simply a question of humanising technology. The technological propaganda is not even concealed: we must build lower skyscrapers *(The Towering Inferno)*, we must build safer aeroplanes *(Airport 75)*, we must build solider cities *(Earthquake)*: the message is always *we must build*. All disasters serve towards this laudable end. On the "Survival", on the contrary, Anna Planeta, the Captain, plans and wreaks destruction from within, a destruction as slow as the progress of the ship. And the ship is conceived as an enormous flower, sweet and carnivorous, which draws into itself the victims of hope.

The dead of the past (the graves of Katyn) are associated with the victims of today; mass extermination may be turned against itself: thus in the documentary sequences of Katyn the Nazis become the "goodies", they themselves film an extermination committed by their enemies, and, offer this as a spectacle of propaganda (just as their adversaries were later to do by filming the Nazi Lagers). The corpse as protagonist is an idée fixe of Makavejev; in *W. R.* the severed head of Milena Dravic; in *Love Affair* the dissected body of the telephonist; in *Innocence Unprotected* the old film which rises from its own ashes. Like the erect phallus which is "frozen" by the appearance of Stalin his corpses are in a state of hibernation. To reanimate the old film of Aleksic, in *Innocence Unprotected,* Makavejev subjects it to a process of historicisation, from which we deduce that the charges of "pro-Nazism" against the acrobat-director were completely mistaken; in fact he was prefiguring the liberation of his country in his film; and so he is restored to life.

The sweet death of Miss World in the bath of chocolate is an indifferent death, filmed for advertising purposes and set up like a spectacle. Bunuel subjects us to a similar game in *Le phantôme de la Liberté:* while the mass exterminator fires from above, we contemplate innocuous snatches of everyday reality, of people passing by. Knowing that someone is going to be hit, the game is to guess who it will be. It is a brilliant reflection on indifference to the spectacle of death; and the conclusion of the episode, where the condemned man goes scot-free, is a more than logical consequence. Both Bunuel and Makavejev invert the terms of the scandalous: there is nothing pornographic or non-representable any more, and the film actually tends to rediscover the lost sense in the attempts to open new horizons for what may be represented.

Makavejev's montage of juxtapositions and Bunuel's inter-connective chain are processes which hover around sense, rather than expressing it, they envelop it, they surround it and then they abandon it. The structure is in continual tension and the effects of surprise load it with tension. Bunuel has each character introduced to the others with the conventions of

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1) **Branco Miljkovic, a young Serbian poet of some repute, was found hanging in Zagreb from a very low tree a few years ago.**

2) and 3) **Sefka and Nail commited some of the most heinous crimes against their families and closest friends.**

bourgeois greeting. The members of the Commune in *Sweet Movie,* after the therapeutic party, gather to sing the Internationale — a well-ordered group. The phantom of liberty appears more visible in these moments of calm, or orthodox passage; it is the harbinger of a new *order,* not the perpetuation of an already existing disorder.

Makavejev exalts schizophrenia: Miss World and Anna Planeta, Reich yesterday and the Reichians today, Aleksic yesterday and Aleksic today, the protagonists are doubles: theses and antitheses. The "third personality" planned for Milena Dravic in the project for "Sweet Movie" was lost, because the Utopian synthesis was disrupted by the exile of Makavejev himself. The forced synthesis of the emigré is the schizophrenic condition par excellence, from Chaplin to Billy Wilder, through Polanski, Lubitsch, Forman and dozens more. The despair of one who sees neither a homeland nor an adopted homeland can lead to the cosmic pessimism of Lang, to the sublime nihilism of *Ninotschka,* to the individualistic subversion of *One, Two, Three;* right from its title this undervalued masterpiece of Wilder's proposed the East, the West and its own monstrous synthesis, a fusion of the worst in both systems which then dominates the world. Makavejev tries to denounce this kind of fusion and proclaims an alternative of a tactical nature: the sweetness of the film, as a consolation for today, as a taste extended to the other senses for tomorrow.

That's Entertainment uses technical and narrative procedures typical of Makavejev to affirm a truth which is negated by his films, that is, that all beauty and sweetness were in the past and cannot be repeated; the film from MGM is an industrial communiqué which takes its place with many others that fill the financial pages and the front pages of newspapers. "We must build" — as we were saying — but we must also take cognisance of the black gravity of the moment, of the productive catastrophe that faces us. The order to "produce entertainment" takes on more and more military tones, and the rush towards entertainment is programmed to evoke the great depressions of the past: the queues of unemployed and the queues at the cinema entrances. The overload of illusory sweetness nourishes the already overcharged ideology of catastrophe. Thus it becomes more and more urgent to *answer* the question in the song from *Sweet Movie:* "Is there life on the Earth?"

Lorenzo Codelli

(translated by Cormac O Cuilleanain)

UNDER WESTERN EYES: VARIATIONS ON A GENRE

1. 'dodge city' and the development of the western

Dodge City, directed by Michel Curtiz in 1939, is a seminal film in the development of the Western, yet it has been strangely neglected — it does not even figure on Andre Bazin's list of important Westerns of 1939-40, the period when it is generally accepted that the Western took on a second lease of life, after languishing with the coming of sound (nor is it mentioned in Bogdanovich's discussion of the best films of 1939). Yet there are many strong reasons for thinking that Curtiz, rather than Ford, was the prime mover in this rebirth of the Western and that *Dodge City* rather than *Stagecoach* set the pattern for its future development. At the time the film was made Curtiz was one of the most active, syccessful and stylistycally influential directors working in Hollywood. He has already made over forty features for Warners and had played an important part establishing them as a major studio and now plunged into making Westerns in a big way, producing *Dodge City, Virginia City* and *The Santa Fe Trail* right along side his other major successes, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex, The Sea Hawk* and *Casablanca.* Curtiz was now at the peak of his career and was operating with strong studio support. He had major box office stars in Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, had composers like Korngold and Max Steiner working on the musical scores and had technical support at the highest level. Unlike *Stagecoach,* which was shot in black and white, *Dodge City* is a technicolor print of astonishingly high quality (Sol Polito was responsible for the photography), which presents a pictorial panorama of the sights and spectacles of the old West, with a verve and splendour that has scarely been equalled since. *Dodge City* is enjoyable simply as a travelogue and vivid recreation of the past — at this point the West is something more than a Hollywood convention or collection of time-worn studio sets.

Moreover, it is no derogation of *Stagecoach* but rather a recognition of the film's outstanding quality to point out that precisely because of its classic simplicity, clarity of outline and economy of structure it represented a formula that could not easily be varied or have changes rung on it in the traditional Hollywood manner. *Stagecoach* could not serve as an influence or create a genre, it could only be copied. The very perfection that Bazin invokes is also the reason why the film remains something of a dead end. On the other hand, it is the very openness of *Dodge City,* the sheer multiplicity, verging on redundance, of its thematic and iconographical material that leaves open the possibility of rearticulation and rephrasing, so that new meanings can be generated through the positioning and relative weighting of different screenplay is a kind of cinematic source-book of the West: it creates a narrative, in a manner that is perhaps characteristic of the historical novel, that attempts to incorporate virtually all of the institutions and icons of the cowboy era. We are shown the stage-coach, the steam-locomotive, buffalo hunters, a cattle drive, lynchings, saloons and gambling halls, the temperance league, a children's picnic, the covered wagons, a barber's shop, a cattle auction, a funeral at Boot Hill, a pioneer newspaper, a cattle stampede, a bar-room brawl. Without these things, obviously, there would be no Western. By the same token, it is a necessary condition of the Western fable that it incorporate as much as possible of this iconographical material into a structure that is logical and avoids excessive redundancy and which will be aesthetically satisfying insofar as it achieves this goal. A synchronic picture of life in the West is built up diachronically through the unfolding of the narrative. However, it should be added that an element of redundancy is *necessary;* so that the picture appears to be independent of the fable and not funtionally subordinated to it; and vice versa. In *Dodge City* the scenes of life on the cattle drive are not strictly necessary to the plot; they are there primarily to complete the canvas of Western experience.

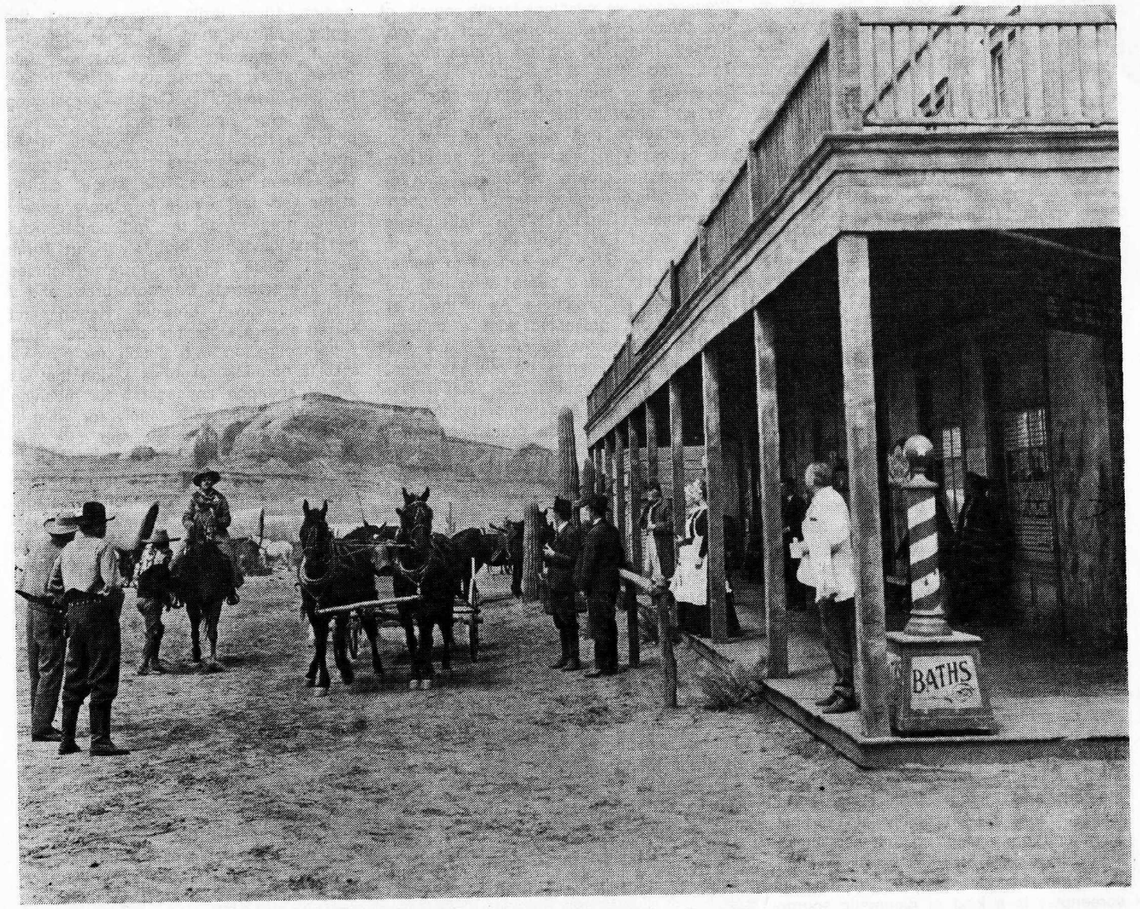
Moreover, it is to *Dodge City* rather than to *Stagecoach* we must look for the source of the thematic ideas worked out by Ford himself from *My Darling Clementine* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. Dodge City* is concerned with the coming of law and order in the west, the transition from violence and anarchy to stability; the necessity for such stability as a precondition for orderly settlement and for the economic development of the nation. Symbolically Curtiz's Wade Hatton and Ford's Wyatt Earp stand in the same relation to the U.S.A. as Aeneas to Rome, they are the culture heroes who laid the foundations for greatness. As in the later Ford we are presented with a cultural conflict between the people of peace and the people of violence; on the one hand, the school, the chapel, the temperance hall, the women and children, the responsible citizenry, the crusading newspaper; on the other, the saloon, the gaming tables the lynch mobs, the unscrupulous profiteers, the hired gun. *Dodge City* develops through a series of escalating conflicts between these two sections which is reinforced by the personalised hostility of their respective leaders, Wade Hatton, the sheriff, and Jeff Surrett, the owner of the Gay Lady saloon. The threat to the peaceable citizenry is shown successively, by the spilling over of a brawl in the Gay Lady into a meeting of the ladies of the Pure Prairie League next door, the disruption of a children's picnic by gunplay in the street, by the shooting of Joe Clemens, the newspaper owner, as he sits at his desk. The impact of the scenes is intensified by the fact that they involve a violation of these people's living space. It is clear that ordinary people are not safe either in the street, or in their usual centres of work and social life. Hatton and Surrett are not simply individuals, they bring to focus a conflict between different groups and divergent values and life styles, which must be resolved one way or another.

Curtiz is justifiably known as a director who specialises in presenting his audience with the maximum of action and spectacle. The story is pursued from multiple aspects simultaneously, highly compressed informative montage sequences fan out into expertly staged action set-pieces, episode spills over into episode without a pause through the use of unending wipes and dissolves. *Dodge City* opens with a spectacular race between stage-coach and locomotive. Curtiz cuts from the stage scene from inside the train to a reverse angle foregrounding the stage with the train in the background. There follows a complex montage sequence in which the repetition of certain parallel elements: the stage driver lashing the horses/fireman filling the boiler; close-up on train wheels/galloping hooves is subtly transformed by articulating them logically rather than analogically. The final sequence functionally differentiates between stage coach and locomotive and denies the dramatic equivalence that has been established by showing first the stage driver urging on his team, their galloping hooves; then flame from the boiler, wheels turning, the engine driver lazily pulls a chord, the whistle blasts, then, in long shot, the coach momentarily gains and the train draws away, pulling out of the frame. No less masterly is Curtiz's introduction of the Gay Lady saloon. The camera pans up from a whirling roulette wheel into a complex pan-track forward through the saloon towards the stage, cutting at the very last minute to a more acutely angled track-in on the girl singer, who has just launched into "My Heart Turns Back to Dixie." *Dodge City* also includes a highly elaborate bar-room brawl and a final show-down between Hatton and Surrett aboard a blazing railroad car. Such a preoccupation with action for its own sake is normally taken as a sign that we should abandon any search for meaning and take *Dodge City* simply for what it is i.e. good entertainment. And it is certainly the case that, taken in isolation, the various episodes in the film have no specific meaning: a stagecoach is a stagecoach and a bar-room brawl is a bar-room brawl. Nevertheless it will be argued that in *Dodge City,* as in art in general, meaning is generated by the way in which these episodes are linked, stressed and inflected, and, that virtually every single detail in *Dodge City* can be shown to have a precise significance. The Western, like the Oedipus story, is a bundle of elements, where what is sayable through it is determined by the way in which they are presented and placed in relation to one another. In the Oedipus story the components are — swollen foot, exposure on hillside, murder of father, solving the riddle of the Sphinx, marriage to mother, plague, blinding, banishment. Versions of the story incorporate linking interpretations (by the oracle) and are subject to further interpretation either through the attribution of causality or suppression of causality at various points in the narrative. Different episodes may appear either as functionally necessary or as symbolically appropriate. The unending task is the attempt to generate meaning, even where the meaning may have been forgotten, like a person who attempts to reconstruct a sentence when only the nouns remain. Or, as Levi-Strauss puts it, in *The Savage Mind:*

> "Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find them a meaning."

Since this analysis of *Dodge City* will be worked out in some detail it may help the reader to begin with a brief summary of events in narrative sequence.

The film opens with the first run of the transcontinental railroad as far as Dodge City, with Colonel Dodge and the railway executive aboard. Wade Hatton, who has been killing buffalo for the railroad company, confronts Jeff Surrett, whom he has reported to the Federal authorities for killing buffalo without a license. Col. Dodge is shown making a speech about the virtues of civilisation — but this is followed by a montage sequence which shows the breakdown of law and order. Matt Cole has sold a large head of cattle to Surrett, but when he demands pay-



The frontier township: Tombstone in Ford's My Darling Clementine

ment he is gunned down in the Gay Lady saloon, by Yancey, Surrett's gunman. At Cole's funeral a warrant is served on Yancey but Surrett and his men ride out of town with the sheriff in a hearse. Hatton (Erroll Flynn) meets Abbie Irving (Olivia de Havilland) on the cattle drive to Dodge City, but is forced to kill her brother Lee in self-defence, after Lee has attempted to cause a cattle stampede. Arriving in Dodge City Hatton again has a confrontation with Surrett in the barber's shop. At auction Hatton refuses to sell his cattle to Surrett, the highest bidder, but makes a separate agreement with Jack Orth, who promises cash. Orth is killed by Yancey. A brawl between Southerners and Northerners causes extensive damage in the Gay Lady. Surrett attempts to have Hatton's friend lynched as a scapegoat. Hatton prevents this, marches Surrett to the sheriff's office — only to find it has been closed. Hatton refuses to take on the job of sheriff himself, but changes his mind when Matt Cole's boy is killed as the result of an outbreak of violence. Hatton attempts to clean up Dodge City by banning firearms, street shooting and gambling after hours. The increased orderliness encourages many new settlers. When Mrs. Cole is forced to sell her house, since she still has not received any money from Surrett, Hatton, Abbie and Joe Clemens, the newspaperman, determine to challenge Surrett's story that Cole lost the money at roulette. Clemens is killed by Yancey but Hatton forces a fellow-gambler at the saloon to provide vital evidence of his guilt. Hatton prevents the lynching of Yancey by driving him out of town and putting him on the train for Wichita. Also on board are Abbie and Surrett, who, for different reasons, have left town for their own safety. The train catches fire; Surrett and his men make to escape on horseback, but are shot down by Hatton. With law and order now established in Dodge City, Hatton, at the invitation of Colonel Dodge, leaves with Abbie for a similar assignment in Virginia City.

For the purpose of analysis the story of *Dodge City* can be broken down into three distinct mythological sets: one concerned with gansterism and the problem of urban violence, one centering on national economic development and the idea of progress, and one concerned with the "reluctant hero."

Urban Violence and Gangsterism

A convenient distinction is often made, in discussions of the American cinema, between the gangster movie, which presents the city and its problems, on the one hand; and the Western which deals with rural America and the frontier. However, it will be argued here that such a presentation is highly over-simplified, if not altogether false. *Dodge City* is heavily encoded in terms of the gangsterism, lawlessness and organised crime that affected American cities in the twenties and the thirties. Dodge City is one of the largest centres of population in the West and it is described in the film as

> "Longhorn cattle center of the world and wide-open Babylon of the American frontier... packed with settlers, thieves and gunmen."

Here the term "wide open" was one that was applied to many American cities in the Prohibition period; and meant that they were open to the operation of organised crime. Similarly the statement by Dr. Fleming — "We're the public disgrace of America" and Colonel Dodge's later reference to Virginia City — "The city is teeming with crime and corruption" broach the familiar theme, from Lincoln Steffens onwards of "the Shame of the Cities." It is important to note the implications of this line of thought: the responsibility for keeping the city clean does not remain purely with an appointed marshall or with the Federal government, it depends on the vigilance and public spiritedness of the citizens themselves. If the city is lawless it is *their* disgrace.

Jeff Surrett is obviously identifiable as a gangster boss. His ownership of the profitable Gay Lady saloon, with its alcohol, gambling and girls reflects the stranglehold which organised crime achieved over speakeasies and illegal liquor sales, prostitution and the numbers racket. With the growth of crime syndicates violence became increasingly abstract: killings were performed by a subordinate or contract killer. Similarly Surrett never guns down his victims but has this done by his gunman, Yancey. Surrett builds up his empire through violence and intimidation; acquiring cattle not through legitimate purchase, but by shooting the vendor. Surrett boasts of the vast sums he makes annually ($ 100,000) through his ownership of the Gay Lady; like Capone he is able to exploit people's need for a little relaxation and entertainment. The conflict between prohibitionists and bootleggers is reflected in *Dodge City* by the opposition to Surret from the Pure Prairie League. Much of the deviousness of gang battles inflects many details of the film. Instead of the straightforward main street showdown Curtiz shows men shooting through windows into the street. Yancey shoots his victims in the back. A hearse is twice used to get people out of town unnoticed. Surrett like Capone gets out of town, when the heat is on, and goes to nearby Spearville; as his lawyer says

> "Jeff's smart enough to know this town's going to be a little warm for a few days so he's just kind of laying low until the excitement blows over."

As in the contemporary gangster movies the struggle against anarchic forces is carried on through an alliance between law-enforcement agencies and a crusading popular press (Joe Clemens); with the story of success spelled out in successive banner headlines — i.e.

> "DODGE CITY WILL BE CLEANED UP"
> "STREET SHOOTING MUST STOP SAYS NEW SHERIFF"
> "DODGE CITY'S CLEAN-UP DRAWS NEW SETTLERS: LAW AND ORDER IN COMMAND."

Since it was often difficult to obtain conclusive evidence against gangland leaders — with income tax evasion notoriously the only charge which the government could pin on Capone — the problem of obtaining evidence against Surrett and Yancey assumes great importance in the film. Clemens is shown compiling a dossier on Surrett's activities and Surrett's accounts are examined. The presence of printing ink on Yancey's hands points to his responsibility for Clemens' murder but the problem of getting witnesses to testify is highlighted when Hatton has to pressurise a fellow gambler into reversing his former statement, that Yancey did not leave the Gay Lady at the time the murder was committed.

Lynching was a continuing social problem in the thirties (though its incidence sharply declined in the early forties after the film was made) and *Dodge City,* like *Fury* and *Young Mr. Lincoln* recognises this through the inclusion of two attemted lynchings and a third that is presented in a montage sequence.

In 1939 there was a widespread feeling that organised crime had been brought under control. The F.B.I. had been the source of many encouraging statements, and, among other things, the year saw the death of Al Capone. Like Walsh's *The Roaring Twenties,* Curtiz's *Dodge City* expressed a widely felt sense that the era of violence was over. But perhaps *Dodge City* can convey this all the more convincingly because it is set in the more distant past. A great part of the significance of the historical genre is that it can provide this sense of an ending. For, in truth, there can never be any endings in the present; for optimism may be false and conclusions premature — especially about crime, which is a continuing social phenomenon. So our sense of an ending, which is, more properly, the des-re for an ending, can be more poetically expressed through images drawn from the past: with peaceful settlers singing hymns in the quiet streets of Dodge City, as Erroll Flynn and Olivia de Havilland set out for Virginia City, and the covered wagons roll off, suffused in the rich glow of a Western sunset.

Building a Nation and the Idea of Progress

Dodge City articulates a clear parallel between the America of the post-Civil War era and the America of the Depression. Just as after the Civil War a wounded and exhausted nation sets about the tasks of reconstruction, economic development and expansion; so after the catastrophe of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and mass unemployment the nation looks to Roosevelt and the New Deal to restore American prosperity. *Dodge City* is organised around the idea of progress — the technical and economic progress that will get America out of her difficulties. The very first image of *Dodge City* presents this in concentrated form: a head-on shot of a splendid gleaming locomotive and over it superimposed the legend:

> "Kansas 1866. The civil war has ended. Armies disband — the nation turns to the building of the West."

This image is doubly reinforced by the triumph of the train over the stagecoach,

The cattle auction in Dodge City

for even in this victory the audience is conscious of the still superior technology that has replaced and is replacing it. Thus the dynamic men who sit aboard the train are those who have a visionary consciousness of America's historic destiny:

> "Gentlemen, that's a symbol of America's future — iron men and iron horses, you can't beat them!"

Such a man, above all, is Colonel Dodge, introduced in Dodge City as "the man who made this progress possible." Looking far beyond present realities and exigencies Colonel Dodge annouces:

> "I can see a great metropolis of homes, churches and schools, a fine, decent city, which will become the flower of the prairie."

The Alliance between Dodge, the civic leader, and the railway executives who build the railroad, both of which are necessary for each other — since the railroad needs the trade in cattle, Dodge City the communications — symbolises the need for government and industry to work together under the programme of the New Deal in order to bring prosperity for all. In fact the picture reproduces two of the main ideological defences of capitalism in the thirties — i.e. that it contributes to economic development and that it provides employment. Here one thinks of Wade Hatton and his men waving a friendly goodbye to the railroad: "There goes our meal-ticket for the last six months." The fundamental distinction made in the film is between those, like Dodge and his friends, who are helping to build a nation and those like Surrett, who rip off profit for themselves and who have no constructive purpose. Here, the distinction made about buffalo hunting at the beginning of the movie is of great importance: Hatton is licensed to slaughter buffalo by the government to enable the company to build its railroad; Surrett on the other hand kills for his own profit and deprives the Indians of their sustenance and livelihood. (No mention of the fact that the building of the railroads was probably the major factor in the elimination of the buffalo from the North American continent). On the one hand, the creators and builders, on the other the destroyers. These meanings are brought together in the final showdown between Hatton and Surrett aboard the train. The train, symbol of progress, is threatened by the outbreak of anarchy — the flaming railroad car — which must be contained. Moreover this represents the uncontrolled and destructive use of power — unlike the flaming boiler of the locomotive at the beginning of the movie which shows power brought under control and used in the service of progress. Symbolically Surrett and his friends are all those who are sabotaging the New Deal.

The Reluctant Hero

In *Dodge City,* as in many other Western movies, great emphasis is placed on the reluctance of Wade Hatton to assume the post of sheriff and to take action against "the undesirable element." He twice refuses the invitation and only takes on the job when the pressure has become absolutely overwhelming. In effect, it takes four deaths to bring him to this point. Hatton's own killing of Abbie Irving's brother places him under a sense of moral obligation to Abbie and her family, which is one factor. Then there is the death of Matt Cole and subsequently of Jack Orth, with whom Wade Hatton has made an agreement to sell the cattle. In addition there is the escalating series of personal confrontations between Wade and Surrett — over the buffalo, in the barber's shop over Rusty's right to have a bath, at the auction, Surrett's attempted lynching of Rusty. But it is only when all the threads come together — in the death of the boy, Harry Cole, friend of Abbie and son of the murdered man that Wade Hatton is finally persuaded. Curtiz emotively signals the transition with a zoom in on Harry's sheriff's badge, and a cut to Hatton buckling on a belt carrying the Sheriff's star.

This theme of the reluctant hero is important in American culture in that it is clearly the bearer of many complex cultural messages . In part it expresses a traditional American distrust of authority and of processes of institutionalisation. Characteristically the protagonist in the Western takes over the job of sheriff or marshall only under specific circumstances, for specific reasons and for specific lengths of time. When the emergency is over that has called for his assumption of authority he lays down his badge and leaves town. Equally, Americans value restlessness, energy, new challenges, the pioneer spirit. Thus, Wade Hatton is described as "the most movin' on man you ever saw", a man who has travelled and fought all over the world and who is reluctant to be tied down. Appropriately, at the end of the movie, he is not content with resting on his laurels, but sets out once more to face the fresh challenge of Virginia City. But for the man to do this on his own would be selfish and irresponsible: it is necessary for Abbie to endorse the project that Wade secretly desires. In addition there is the emphasis in American society on *homo economicus:* the individual is only concerned with following his own self-interest which he defines in a very narrow way and will not be drawn into matters which he does not regard as being strictly his concern. This cuts both ways: he will not get entangled in other' peoples arguments, but he will also solve his own problems and not ask for outside assistance. Paradoxically, the integrity of the American hero is defined by the fact that he is not moved by ideals and will only do things for money (eg. many roles played by Humphrey Bogart and Clint Eastwood; also *The Professionals).* He avoids binding agreements and permanent alliances in favour of temporary pacts and strictly delimited once-for-all deals.

However, perhaps the most important aspects of the reluctant hero is the way in which he conveys a national self image. Americans regard their country as one that is patient, reluctant to respond to provocation, slow to anger, but one which will not hesitate to respond when the threat is genuine and when the emergency is critical. This reluctance has either symbolically or actually characterised the most important episodes in American history. The American colonists were unwilling to take steps against the mother country despite the undoubted justification they possessed in the policies of George III. Lincoln was reluctant to plunge his country into a destructive Civil War and only took action against the South when it was clear that there was no other alternative. Woodrow Wilson had no wish to get involved in a European war and only entered World War I in 1917, when it appeared, or was made to appear, that neutrality was no longer a possible option. The figure of the reluctant hero, as embodied by Wade Hatton in *Dodge City,* is therefore a complex and composite cultural image, communicating both individualistic values and a sense of American national identity.

Dodge City and the Post-War Western

Dodge City is sufficiently different from the pattern of many Westerns made in the years immediately following World War II to make comparative analysis fruitful and to permit the development of hypotheses about the nature of the re-articulation in meaning and structure that occurred. To begin with, the theme of the coming of civilisation and the establishment or re-establishment of law and order persists, but, since organised crime is no longer felt to constitute a significant problem, the encoding in terms of gangsterism is suppressed. This is characteristic of mythic structures in general, they survive and outlive the specific historical circumstances that contributed to their formulation and which gave them a high degree of precision, and what they are about, in any but the most general terms, is more or less lost sight of. As Lévi-Strauss points out in his study of "The Story of Asdiwal", in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism:*

> "When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another, and there exist differences of language, social organisation or way of life which make the myth difficult to communicate, it begins to become impoverished and confused."

By post-war standards the ending of *Dodge City* is disappointing. Instead of a personalised main street confrontation between hero and villain, Hatton uses a Winchester to shoot down Surret and his men from their horses — as if they were Indians! In the context of *Dodge City* and the climate of opinion in the thirties this is symbolically appropriate — in keeping with the whole Hoover terminology of "rats" and "public enemies." Criminals must not be dignified or glorified but must be seen as the contemptible enemies and outcasts that they are. So Yancey and Surrett are shot down far from the eyes of any audience, in a scene that is deliberately without resonance. This, in turn, points to the significance of such a resonance in the re-articulation of meaning in the post-war Western.

During World War II the Western temporalily dropped out of sight. After the war, war movies were very popular and Westerns also began to attract a large audience. Part of this appeal may have been due to the fact that Westerns appeared as war films under another guise. For many people were tired of the war and wished to forget it and the Western offered many of the same satisfactions in an intriguingly different guise: it was likewise an "action" genre with plenty of shooting and violence, where friend and enemy, good guy and bad guy, were clearly distinguished. By 1950, the Western was the major sector of Hollywood production, with over one hundred features reaching the screen. Generalisations obviously involve a certain risk when such a vast range of movies is involved. Many films involved the relation between white men and Indians and some even presented the Indian point of view sympathetically. Others presented conflicts between cattle men and homesteaders, personalised rivalries of cattle drives or wagon trains, the careers of outlaws and border raiders, the exploration of the West. Nevertheless it is true to say that quite a large number of Westerns, especially following 1950, did follow the pattern (already present in *Dodge City)* of an escalating conflict between hero and villain, but which (unlike *Dodge City)* culminates in a main street shoot-out. It is this pattern I want to discuss and, in particular, to suggest that it constitutes a rearticulation of the mythic structure of the Western, away from domestic problems and towards a form of discourse concerned with international relations and the cold war.

Although this type of Western is well known it may be as well to enumerate some of its principal features, since it is an assumption of the method of analysis adopted here that all such details are significant:

1. Great emphasis is placed on the self-reliance of the hero. He seldom finds or looks for assistance from others — if he received aid at all it is usually only from a small band of fellow professionals. *(Rio Bravo).*

   This is very different from *Dodge City,* where, very much in the spirit of the New Deal, and the Thirties, it is *leadership* that is stressed. Hatton has support, but he provides the leadership that has been lacking.
2. The confrontation between hero and villain is highly personalised and both appear as being on a higher level than the other characters — they have a samurai character.
3. The action is set in a small and relatively peaceful Western town.
4. The threat to peace invariably comes from without. Gunmen ride into town and start to shoot up the place. They kill or intimidate peaceful citizens and threaten to drive them from their homes or property.
5. The action follows an escalation scenario, in which the hero often ignores an initial provocation, but is forced to respond both forcefully and appropriately when it appears that the threat is real.
6. Poker becomes an important metaphor for the action of the movie. The hero must be ready to call his opponents bluff — i.e. by challenging him to draw or to commit himself, but at the same time must be ready to bluff himself until assistance is at hand or until circumstances can be turned to his advantage.

These features closely correspond to the nature of the tension and international conflict between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union after World War II. It is important to recognise the centrality of the idea of the "reluctant hero" in the mythic rearticulation, since it is not merely a matter of how Americans view themselves but also a matter of how they will be viewed by the others. In the post-war period both America and Russia are Superpowers, they stand on a different level from the others. Moreover the contries of Western Europe are exhausted by war: when the chips are down they cannot be relied on for assistance. America must rely on herself and her technological hardware (A bomb, B 52s, missiles) to defend herself. Moreover the notion that the U.S.A. is "a reluctant hero" is a definite liability in relation to her new power and obligations. There is a very definite risk indeed that Stalin will assume that American statements about defending the "free world" will not be taken seriously. A hawkish posture, by Dulles, is necessary to undo the damage and potential weakness created by the image of American reluctance. Thus, in the post-war Western the reluctant hero is also a self-reliant hero: great pains are taken to demonstrate that his reluctance to move or to get involved must not be construed as lack of nerve. The gradual escalation of violence in the Western closely corresponds to the scenarios of the Rand Corporation, in which it is always important to respond with closely calculated counter-measures, that always leave further strategic options in reserve. This is not to say that the escalation scenario of the Western is copied from the cold war, for it clearly precedes it — rather it is a pre-existing element that can be used to re-articulate the Western in terms of the problems confronting America in the post-war world.

Similarly poker becomes an important metaphor since, in keeping with the new American mood of realism, it demands a cool assessment of one's own hand and characters of others (unlike, for example, Woodrow Wilson). It is necessary to know whether others really will do what they say or whether threats (bluffs) are to be taken at their face value. In her foreign policy it was necessary for the U.S.A. to continually think in such terms. America called Stalin's bluff over Berlin with the Berlin Airlift (graduated response), proving that he was not prepared to go to war over this issue. But America also showed that she herself was not bluffing by her readiness to go to war in defence of South Korea. Again the importance of the main street duel, lies in the fact that it can articulate meanings about the cold war: — America boldly and courageously confronts evil (the menace of international Communism) before the eyes of the whole world (for it is important in the Western that everyone should be watching) and thus asserts her manhood. The hero wins even though he draws last (nuclear counter-strike capability, massive retaliation through strategic air command or missiles).

The more we examine the small town milieu of the Western the more it appears that it is dictated not so much by the banal criterion of verisimilitude (i.e. that most Western towns were small). For many other details of the Western are not convincing in these terms — Dodge City for example was cleaned up by deputies using Winchesters, which outranged the sixguns of ordinary cowpunchers and were considerably more accurate, yet it is virtually axiomatic in the Western that hero and villain shall confront one another on the same conditions. Nor does it seem probable that the small Western town represents any very convincing image of rural America. Rather the small town context seems dictated by the need to clarify and rearticulate the message of the Western: to show that it now deals with America's relation to the world, in which the small town appears as a fitting image of a peaceful and peace-loving America, that asks for nothing more than to be allowed to carry on with its own affairs, but which finds itself living under the threat of a violence that no longer stems from within, but which comes from *without* — a menace that is essentially external and alien. Even the very abstractness of the Western in this period, its deliberate avoidance of a historical flavour, is a way of signalling the contemporaneity of its message. Yet its "timeless" character was an illusion to which we can no longer easily subscribe and the Western has itself moved on to new constellations of meaning: the futility of Vietnam, the diminished role of America in the world, the doubtfulness of her own moral purposes. Recently the theme of the pointless quest, worked out in such movies as Peckinpah's *Major Dundee* and *The Wild Bunch* and in Monte Heliman's *The Shooting* has assumed a central importance not least because of the new mood of scepticism which it reflects. Consequently it would appear that the characteristic iconography and structure of the post-war Western was determined by the overriding need for clarity of communication. Mythemes are redistributed primarily so that the mythology once again can have something to say. Otherwise the Western would lose its immediate relevance and appeal and would be little more than a residue from the past, simultaneously as expressive and futile as a silver bullet. Mythological patterns are universal only in so far as they lend themselves to restructuring; the Western is syntactically rich, not because it conveys some timeless truth or intrinsic meaning, but because of its suppleness and flexibility; through the facility with which its mythic components can be reassembled into new forms that respond to the urgency of the present. The Western is a formula that *formulates* — articulating problems, contingencies, hopes and fears; that touches, by its very precision, on the deepest emotional chords.

David Morse

A clear severity of style: Santiago (Arthur Kennedy) and Maria (Betta St. John) in a pastoral interlude from The Naked Dawn

2. the case of edgar g. ulmer

The question of German directors in Hollywood is a vexing one. Sometimes what is meant by a 'Germanic flavour' is a sense of fate (as in Fritz Lang's case), sometimes it is a decorative quality (often loosely described as 'baroque': cf. Sternberg, Ophuls, Sirk . .), sometimes it is a mixture of metaphysics and visual style, also referred to as 'Expressionism.' Then again there is the 'Berliner' side of things as opposed to the 'Viennese': Biedermeier rather than baroque, with sexual innuendo and guffaws (Lubitsch; Wilder?). One of the main problems is that the imaginary geography of *idées reçues* (which sometimes happen to be genre conventions as well) is often at variance with the historical data we have on directors of German background. German background. To give but a few examples: for some time Stroheim fooled everybody (because they wanted to be fooled) and had them believe he was Count Erich Maria Stroheim von Nordenwald; the fact that he had the same kind of social and ethnic background as Josef 'von' Sternberg obviously casts a slightly different light on his films, removes them a step further from the naive conception of an 'autobiography.' As far as Sternberg himself is concerned, it should be remembered that he came to America much earlier in his life than Stroheim, and one might wonder, from a historical, rather than an aesthetic, viewpoint, whether he is to be considered a Viennese at all. Preminger for one is sick and tired of references to his 'Viennese' back-ground and has made it known he hates Vienna, *A Royal Scandal* or *The Cardinal* notwithstanding. Conversely, Max Ophuls, whose name critics have so often associated with the Hapsburg capital, may have loved the city, but had more to do with Paris, Hamburg or Berlin. Caution, therefore, is called for, and we must distinguish between (presumably unconscious) signs of the director's background, his (conscious) reaction to this background, and his (conscious) reference to Germanic traditions in which he was not himself brought up.

It is also necessary to add a further nuance to the issue by looking at it from the American point of view. One does not need to be German-born in order to be attracted by real or imagined 'Germanic' qualities; witness Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (which Pauline Kael, obsessed as she is by historical evidence, insists on crediting to Peter Lorre via Gregg Toland!). What is also true is that blends of backgrounds and traditions are sometimes achieved, and the result is so smooth that it becomes pointless to ask who or what is responsible for what components: here I am thinking in particular of the Deanna Durbin films directed by Henry Koster (Hermann Kosterlitz). They have a very moving, entertaining and successful quality of *Kitsch* which I would be hard put to ascribe to America alone or to Germany alone. As a cross-reference, one might ask the same question about Allan Dwan's *Heidi*. In both cases the material (American in Deanna Durbin's case, German Swiss in *Heidi's)* and the treatment (a German: Koster; a Canadian: Dwan) are geographically heterogeneous, stylistically they seem to be made for each other.

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If we turn to Edgar G. Ulmer, we find some striking historical evidence: Ulmer worked under Murnau on no fewer than seven films: *The Last Laugh* (1924), *Tartuffe* (1925), *Faust* (1926), *Sunrise* (1927), *The Four Devils* (1929), *City Girl* (1929) and *Tabu* (1931). But, firstly, is Murnau as Germanic as Domarchi has claimed, or is he not universal? *Sunrise,* although signed by Murnau and Carl Mayer, and based on a piece of German literature, sums up the whole *international* achievement of the silent cinema (whereas *The Last Laugh,* which may aim at a universal language through lack of titles, is very dated indeed by German expressionism). The specifically Germanic elements in Murnau are turned into something universal in the same way as specifically American elements become universal in King Vidor's films. This is no vague comment on the appeal of these films, but rather a reflection of what Murnau and Vidor successfully set out to do. Now, it is obvious that Ulmer has been influenced by Murnau's 'universal' ambitions; but he has turned Murnau's universals, Murnau's archetypes, into allegories — allegories of themselves. Such is the point I would like to make about two of Ulmer's most accomplished films, *The Naked Dawn* (1954) and *The Cavern (Neunzig Nächte und ein Tag / Sette contro la morte,* 1965). These films could both be described as 'heavily symbolic' (a German sense of fate?), were it not for the fact that their 'symbols' seem to have neither *signified,* nor *referent,* apart from themselves.

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The Naked Dawn is regarded as one of Ulmer's best films. A Universal-International production, it is a film with little action, slow pace, mostly philosophizing about the essentials of life between three main characters: Santiago (Arthur Kennedy), an outlaw; Manuel (Eugene Iglesias), a poor Indian peasant, and Maria (Betta St. John), Manuel's wife. Hence an impression of Kammerspiel, of theatre in camera. Ulmer's concern is not so much to describe the conflicts between Santiago's way of life and Manuel's as to emphasize the basic similarity of their plights. The viewer keeps asking himself which of the two men is more miserable than the other. Santiago is no romantic figure: at the beginning of the film, he loses his friend and associate *Vicente when they steal watches from a* train. He is not independent since, in order to get paid for the stolen merchandise, he is at the mercy of a corrupt customs officer. Having fought for the money, he goes to spend it in a bar and gets into a brawl, nearly losing everything again. The bunch of money proves tempting to Manuel, who thinks of killing Santiago. (This is the theme of the basic similarity: "Manuel learns quick"; "Santiago taught Manuel"; etc.). Finally the customs officer seeks revenge, and, failing to lay hands on Santiago, he seizes Manuel. Santiago kills the officer but is himself mortally wounded.

Thus there is no escape for the outlaw. The ending is neatly reminiscent of the beginning of the film: Vicente's death, with Santiago acting as friend and priest, prefigures Santiago's own death. At the end of the film Santiago's own words to Vicente are heard again off screen: "and the gates of Heaven will swing wide open . . ." etc. A circular structure: a sense of fate. No escape is possible, but, had it been possible, it would have been equally pitiful: after Santiago has talked to Maria in glowing terms about "Vera Cruz... the women of Vera Cruz... the dancers of Vera Cruz," Maria asks him to take her with him. Santiago then denounces in the strongest terms the romanticism he had indulged in, implying that Vera Cruz would be no different from the brawl witnessed earlier on. Characters have symmetrical illusions about one another: to Manuel and Maria, Santiago *is* a romantic figure, dangerous but fascinating; at the same time, Santiago is obviously sensitive to the prosaic domestic qualities of Manuel and Maria's life. They are poetic to him, by contrast.

Ulmer stresses the material starkness of the peasant couple and has them flee at the end of the film, not a very hopeful ending even though they are apparently reconciled, since all they now have between them is one horse, and they have had to abandon their piece of land, their house which was "better than the house of the patron" because it was theirs. The difference between *Sunrise* and *The Naked Dawn* is summed up by the 'nakedness' in Ulmer's title. Nevertheless, it is true that, in purely visual terms, the spectator's point of view must coincide with Santiago's, as Ulmer dwells on the 'prose poetry' of the house and the girl. Simple gestures: she is seen taking a jug of water, undressing and having a shower (there is a striking shot of her naked legs with a hen absent-mindedly passing by); finally she puts on a blouse and skirt. Earlier on there had been the sequence of Santiago's introduction to the poor house, with the crucifix at the place of honour, the piglets, Maria making tortillas and wearing a cross on her breast. (The cross is a leitmotiv in the film, the first example being the one on Vincente's tomb, close to a cactus which itself resembles a twisted cross. Again, at the end of the film, the tree where the customs officer wants to hang Manuel, looks like a cross. Mortally wounded, Arthur Kennedy leans against the trunk of a tree . . . These crosses and *skeleton trees are emblems of the desert* and barrenness, whereas Betta St. John is associated with water and fertility: she is first seen by a pond; cf. also the scene with the water running from the jug.) But, unlike what happens in most American films, such 'symbols' are not found as one (not immediately apparent) thread among many, as an implicit text beneath (or within) the apparent (diegetic) film. With Ulmer, the difference is minimal, the film itself is really nothing but a sequence of archetypes. The archetypal quality of the visual element is reinforced by the use of voices off, and 'folklore' (i.e.., typically 'Mexican') programmatic music which systematically underlines the action. If *The Naked Dawn* were more traditional, more respectful of the conventions of action films, Westerns, etc., this effect would appear very clumsy; as it happens, it further establishes the 'abstract' quality of the film, it contributes to the overall impression we have of watching a ceremonial which is strongly hieratic, yet does not refer to any hereafter, for which there is no available 'key' symbolic, yet, paradoxically, signifying nothing. In other words, Ulmer's films appear rather similar to Miklos Jancso's (cf. in particular *The Technique* and *The Rite).*

This is confirmed by *The Cavern,* which will remain Ulmer"s last film, since he died in 1972. There are more characters in *The Cavern* than in *The Naked Dawn,* but this is compensated by the fact that the characters are prisoners in a cave. Thus there is the same sense of a puppet theatre, of pitiful examples of humanity being manipulated by a director who is not all-powerful, who is himself dependent on Fate, but wears the indifferent mask of Fate. The scene is Italy in September, 1944. Imprisoned in the cavern following an explosion is a group consisting of: an Italian shepherdess (Anna / Rossana Schiaffino), her Italian boy-friend (Mario / Nino Castelnuovo), two Americans: Joe Kramer (John Saxon) and Captain Wilson, a Canadian (Lieutenant Carter), an Englishman (General Braithwaite / Brian Aherne), and their German prisoner (Hans). The film then proceeds (again at a very slow, deliberate tempo) to show the shifting relationships between the members of the group. Conflicts arise for a multiplicity of reasons: Anna's presence and especially the fact that she and Joe are immediately drawn to each other, inciting Mario's and Wilson's jealousy; national differences; various hidden character defects (Wilson is an alcoholic; so is Braithwaite, who is no 'retired general' as he implies; etc.). *Several escape attempts are made, whose* inventiveness is matched only by Ulmer's inventiveness in foiling them. Carter and Mario spend much time and effort digging a tunnel and they finally break into . . . the lower part of the cavern, where Hans is also busy looking for an escape (the irony of the situation is punctuated by the noise of a falling drop of water in the echoing cavern). Then the trapped men build a dam in order to use the bed of the underground river as an exit; the sequence is full of *references to the myth of Theseus:* the river is a maze; Joe is tied up to a rope which is handed over to him by Anna (Ariadne); the water pursues him, furiously beating against the wooden dam like a bull in a ring against a talanquera (the Minotaur). All Saxon finds this time is another, smaller cavern. Later, after the Christmas party, the first human casualty occurs: Wilson, the drunkard, drowns. Hans, by himself, finds a way to the outside world, he climbs up a kind of a well (and the music soars in mounting expectation), actually gets out, blinded by the light of the sun. The eagle and swastika of his uniform are picked out by a zoom, subsequently explained by the presence of Italian partisans watching through binoculars; they shoot Hans. As the sun sets, he crawl back into the cavern, but dies without the others finding him or hearing his cries for help. (Another piece of irony is that, when they first ask where Hans has gone, somebody says: "It's that German efficiency" — he is being thorough in his research ...). A fresh escape attempt is made by Carter. Like Joe earlier on, he tries to use the underground river as an exit, he wears a gasmask and air is being pumped into a pipe. The pipe breaks against a rock; like a dismembeed puppet, Carter falls along a succession of cascades and at last, ironically, reaches the open sky, riding the mane of a gigantic cascade. Here the irony is underlined by Joe's telling Mario to "keep on pumping" *after* we have seen the pipe break against the rock. The irony, however, is somewhat superficial, since it is also implied that Carter has willingly sacrificed himself for the sake of Joe and Anna. Before he leaves, he gives Joe a ring which had belonged to his wife, and which Joe is supposed to give Anna. Finally, a sense of ritual is emphasized, as Carter introduces himself and his attempt as if he were a conjurer and Mario his assistant.

Now that only four survivors are left out of seven, they are going mad and justify John Belton's description of Ulmer's characters as 'prisoners of paranoia.' After 152 days in the cavern, one of the characters explaims, "We're all turning crazy." Later, Mario attacks Joe, and Joe comments: "We're all crazy." Gen. Braithwaite does lose his mind, but his very madness provides an unexpected means of liberation: he threatens to blow up the place with a grenade, the stocked ammunitions are blown up and a conflagration is started; at the same time, one sees an opening in the cavern, Mario and Anna come out, carrying Joe, while one hears Brian Aherne's *voice off* "God said — let there

be light ... and God saw the light — and it was good."

The light / darknes opposition of the film as a whole, and of its ending in particular, is so fundamental yet obvious that it hardly symbolizes anything except itself. Certainly, it would be possible to argue that the cavern is a metaphor for the dark forces of the human psyche, for madness; it would then appear that the only escape from madness is through madness, (i.e. what is symbolized by Brian Aherne's character, if we consider that the 'Seven against Death' are but one persona). "In *The Cavern,* the characters' original sense of entrapment in the cave increases with each failure to find a way out of it until the cavern itself begins to represent the physical embodiment of the characters' inner turbulence, fear, paranoia, and insanity."[1])

More important in our opinion, are the ritualized attempts at survival even within the context of the cavern, of madness. Witness Carter's self-introduction as a conjurer; the passing on of the ring; earlier on, the reading of the Book of Genesis by Brian Aherne (taken up again at the end), accompanied by tracks forward on the walls and stalagmites of the cavern, a new creation of the world taking place under our eyes (in this sense, the cavern is, quite simply, our world, not a dark world which would stand opposed to a world of light). From the point of view of ritual, there is, above all, the long scene of the Christmes party. Mario manages to make a Christmas tree, Hans plays 'Silent Night, Holy Night' on the harmonica and gives all the others flutes which he has succeded in carving. They all drink punch, eat Anna's pet goat, roasted. Mario presents Anna with a necklace he has made. The celebration finishes with a sing song, ethnic differences are forgotten, a toast to peace is made. Mario is seen as the resourceful Homo Faber, the German as the musician / poet. Alcohol is shared; but madness takes over again when the General gets up, wants to take his leave, and thanks everybody for an excellent Christmas dinner: "All good things must come to an end" etc. It is also at the conclusion of the party that Wilson goes off by himself, taking some bottles, and is subsequently drowned.

A sense of ritual and a sense of symbolism are ever present in *The Cavern,* but they must of necessity baffle 'archetypal' criticism, since the ritual, the symbolism, do not refer to anything beyond themselves. The lyricism of a number of scenes inside the cavern (mostly early scenes with Rossana Schiaffino and her goat) is not even nostalgically reminiscent of the 'outside world.' It is true that these scenes occur before madness sets in, that a progression does take place in the film as a whole; nevertheless, such scenes are not absent from the second part of the film (the turning point being the Christmas party). The prevalent feeling is that the cavern is not so much an allegory of 'the world', as a world, complete in itself, both deeply individual and profoundly similar to any number of possible worlds. It is not surprising that Ulmer should have directed a version of *L'Atlantide* (1961). Entrapment and liberation are relative, they are simply the entrance into, and exit from, a given world, complete unto itself. The scenes which show Rossana Schiaffino washing herself are very reminiscent of Betta St. John's scenes in *The Naked Dawn.* Anna washes, stripped to the waist, and hums a song, unaware of Wilson's watching presence on the other side of the water. Sensuously she washes her legs at exactly the same time as (in another part of the 'underworld') Brian Aherne has a fit: 'indifferent' juxtaposition of a world which includes both sensuous poetry and convulsive madness. Later, there is a beautiful love scene between Anna and Joe. The sequence opens with a shot of the same setting: a cascade, a lake, Rossana Schiaffino and her goat, John Saxon nearby. Then Anna and Joe are found in a part of the cavern which looks like an oratory; the sound of organ music accompanies shots of Schiaffino's fingers caressing the stalagmites (the stalagmites are the candles of the circular cavern's oratory; they are also obvious phallic 'symbols' — indexes of themselves, rather). This is followed by a shot of John Saxon's fingers upon Schiaffino's; they kiss. Schiaffino's beautifully white, sculptural face is seen to splendid effect.

Throughout *The Cavern,* visual and musical style has a ritualistic quality first thanks to the slow, deliberate use of 'monotonous' images (this is to be taken in the literal, musical sense) and thanks to the matching use of unrealistic music, punctuations of solos played on the organ, on the flute and drums, or on the bass. Mention must be made, as well as of Carlo Rustichelli's music, of Gabor Pogany's photography (is he a relation of Art Nouveau draughtsman, later Hollywood art director Willy Pogany?). Though it received very scant critical attention when first released, Ulmer's *The Cavern,* a German-Italian production, is the fitting enigmatic epilogue to a highly individual, largely confidential career, whose path has crossed the path of Hollywood without ever really merging with it. If *Ruthless* (1948), with its sophisticated flashback structure, is quite typical of many productions of the forties, *The Strange Woman* (1945) is far wilder than most romantic dramas of the time; the coldness and decorative archness of *The Black Cat* (1934) put it poles apart from the standard horror film of the thirties. One does find the same quality of 'symbols without an external referent' elsewhere than in *The Naked Dawn* (again, highly atypical as a 'Mexican' Western) or *The Cavern:* in Arch Obolers *Five* (1951) for instance — a film which has little to do with Hollywood, but has, like Ulmer's, works, the distinction of being American *cinéma de poesie* outside of the epic mode. The prosody of Ulmer's films has the stamp of the soliloquy about it; it does not re-echo elsewhere in Hollywood.

Jean-Loup Bourget

[1]) John Belton, "Prisoners of Paranoia", "The Velvet Light Trap (Madison, Wisconsin), No. 5 (Summer 1972), p.19, col.1.

Book Review

Visions of Yesterday
By Jeffrey Richards
Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973 (£5.50).

Visions of Yesterday is a description and analysis of three cinemas which Jeffrey Richards regards as exponents of three right-wing ideologies. The bulk of the text is devoted to "The Cinema of Empire," the Empire being British but the films being American as often as English. The following sections give an account of "The Cinema of Populism," with brief chapters on Capra, McCarey and Ford; and of "The Cinema of National Socialism." I shall restrict myself for the most part to the "Imperial" chapters as they are both the most satisfying and the most original. As Richards himself says, "with populism and Nazism, I am examining cinematic genres on which some research has already been done (. . .). But in looking at the Imperial cinema, I am entering virgin territory, tentatively feeling out the lines of the genre" (p. xvi).

To explain away populism as a "right-wing ideology," and Capra and McCarey as spokesmen of populism, is questionable enough. To treat John Ford according to the same standard seems almost perverse, although the reappraisal of *The Hurricane* is very welcome. To state that Ford and Capra "stand head and shoulders above" McCarey (p. xvi; cf. p. 254) is rather rash: even if one accepts the fashionable view that Ford stands head and shoulders above everybody else, deciding between Capra and McCarey is surely a matter of personal taste.

The final chapter, on the Nazi cinema, is sound enough. One is simply sorry to see Richards join the crowd who thinks Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* "spell-binding" (p. 295). Am I the only one to find it pompously dull?

In other words, Richards is at his most illuminating when discussing the films he knows best and is obviously most partial to. To go back to the Imperial cinema, he is primarily concerned with the explicit ideologies conveyed by the films and with the conscious propagandist aims of the film-makers. He points out that the cinema of Empire was steeped in the literature of Kipling, Buchan, Edgar Wallace, Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, Burroughs (Tarzan was an English lord). But he also pays attention to *film as film,* in particular to the incarnation of imperialist myths in the pipe-smoking, mustachioed faces of such actors as Ronald Colman, C. Aubrey Smith, David Niven et al. This cinema produced a large number of visually exciting films, from Ford's *Lost Patrol* to Cukor's *Bhowani Junction,* from Wellman's *Beau Geste* to Saville's *Kim.*

It is obviously possible to quibble with Richards on many points of detail. For example, since he thinks it fit to include the French Foreign Legion, why does he leave out Sternberg's *Morocco?* Also, parody and irony are given scant attention: there is no mention of Laurel and Hardy's *Bonnie Scotland,* which takes them to India, nor of Lubitsch's use of Herbert Marshall and C. Aubrey Smith against the type in *Trouble in Paradise,* nor of the opening of Blake Edwards's *The Party,* a parody of *Gunga Din.* This is a pity, both because parody might have helped Richards define the patterns typical of the genre, and because it begs the question of the extent to which Imperial films were taken seriously by the general public. It might also have given Richards an intimation of an interesting element which he fails to remark on: even though most American films fit easily into the Imperialist framework, some ambiguity could occur in the relationship between America and Britain, as it certainly does in the relationship between America and the British monarchy.

In "The Golden Crown and the Silver Screen" *(Cambridge Review,* October 1974), Jeffrey Richards attacks the semiological school of cinema criticism and argues in favour of the method he used in *Vision of Yesterday.* He applies it to another body of films, "The Cinema of Monarchy," with its "ritual enactments of monarchical superiority." "Films," he says, "could be made both in Britain and the United States about British monarchy — for in both cases, monarchy served as a useful metaphor for established authority" (p. 10). True often enough. Yet Hollywood made films about Parnell (Stahl) or Joan of Arc (Fleming) which, at least by implication, do not show the English/British monarchy at its best. One may also mention Ford's *Mary of Scotland,* or Curtiz's *Captain Blood,* in which the eponymous hero is sent by his King to the West Indies and slavery for having nursed a bunch of rebels. A film mentioned by Richards himself, Preminger's *Forever Amber,* closes on a shot of Linda Darnell (the King's abandoned mistress) watching as her former true love (Cornel Wilde) and their child wander off in the general direction of Virginia. The Virgin Land of America and the hope it represents are explicitly opposed to "the sickness of the age" and the decadence of the English monarchy (cf. George Sanders's foppish portrayal of Charles II). The Anglo-saxon solidarity and the myth of monarchy Richards refers to were often undermined by, or clashed with, the myth of America, the land of youth, opportunities and equality, in contradistinction to the Old Continent, stricken with social and political paralysis. In such cases the British monarchy is as much a metaphor for repressive authority as the Napoleonic (cf. LeRoy's *Anthony Adverse)* or the Austrian Mexican (cf. Dieterle's *Juarez).*

It may be worth examining how Richards' approach relates to the ideological "deconstruction" along the lines of *Cahiers du Cinéma* on *Young Mr Lincoln.* Apparently the methods are poles apart. I have mentioned Richards's anger and impatience with the semiologists ("they are in danger of choking their ideas to death under the multi-layered cotton wool of linguistics-inspired jargon," *(Cambridge Review,* p. 10). Conversely, what *Screen* wrote about John M. Smith on Hitchcock applies perfectly to Jeffrey Richards on the cinema of Empire:

"Whereas the *Cahiers* search for 'meaning' is in the disjuncture between content and form, signified and sign, the ideology and the text, what is not said, in the hollows and in the gaps, the analysis by John Smith of Hitchcock's English works accepts the coherence of Hitchcock's apparent ideological project (. . .)."

If *Cahiers* explores 'breaks,' Smith is after unities and synthesis and the films which appear most coherent (form and content perfectly integrated) are those which are deemed 'best'.

It can be assumed that where Smith finds patterns of meaning re-asserted and developed in Hitchcock as signs of coherence of Hitchcock's world (ideology), the *Cahiers* would find precisely in an "apparent formal coherence . . . that it is riddled with cracks." *(Screen,* vol. 13, no 3, Autumn 1972, pp. 2-3).

Where Richards differs from Smith is in his refusal to evaluate the films he discusses: "I am not embarked primarily on a critical or aesthetic evaluation of films. My role is much more that of a textual critic and I have therefore looked at both 'good' and 'bad' films in search of the themes that concern me (. . .)." *(Visions of Yesterday,* p. xv). Again, in the *Cambridge Review:* "In my recent book (. . .), I adopted yet another method of evaluating films (I take it he means "analysing"). This was to look at them not as works of art but as artefacts. It is the approach of an historian and sociologist rather than that of an art critic. (. . .) There was no attempt to judge the visual or aesthetic merit of the films, no discussion of whether the films were 'good' or 'bad' " (p. 10). How far this is true can be judged by the following extract from *Vision of Yesterday:*

> The film which triumphantly draws together all these threads is John Cromwell's *The Prisoner of Zenda,* one of the purest and noblest fables of love and honour ever put on film. The direction is faultless, the writing brilliant, the production impeccable, the score unforgettable and the actors so perfect that one would be forgiven for thinking that the parts had been written for them. What more can one say? Glittering set-pieces are handled with elegance and panache, the intimate moments with sensivity and sincerity and the film reaches its climax with perhaps the most exciting and certainly the most amusing sword duel in all cinema. It is Hollywood myth-making at its most potent and most evocative. (p. 72).

So what Screen wrote about John M. Smith does obtain after all.

Richards (although he claims to be an historian, a sociologist, rather than an art critic) does belong to what *Screen* called (in 1972) "the mainstream of British film criticism," with its refusal to believe in a distinction between form and content. The *Cahiers* and *Screen* itself, on the other hand, search for meaning "in that area of separation within and between signs, and, by extension be-

Images of royalty: George Sanders in Preminger's Forever Amber

tween form and content, language and thought" *(loc. cit.)*. I may mention in passing that the formulation of this approach by *Screen* is rather unorthodox. To talk of "the disjuncture between (...) signified and sign" (or even, for that matter, between signified and signifier) when one invokes linguistics is, to say the least, unexpected: the definition of a sign by Saussure is the *indissoluble* union of signified and signifier. One might as well use behaviorism as a frame of reference and then move on to the distinction between mind and body. The same is true, of course, of *Screen's* embarking on the possible separation between "langauge and thought," a separation which, far from breaking fresh ground, would only herald a return to a certain idealistic ideology much despised by *Screen*. To sum up: when *Screen* makes a distinction between form and content, it should be clear that there is neither strictly meaningless form nor, certainly, formless content, and that what *Screen* must have in mind is the familiar opposition between the apparent (explicit) content and the (implicit) content of the form, an opposition which goes at least as far back as Nietzsche. To use Christian Metz's linguistic terminology, when one is after *signs and meaning* in the cinema, one searches for "connotation," not just "denotation". The signifier of "connotation" (e.g. a particular atmosphere) in fact includes both the signifier (e.g. camera angle, lighting) and the signified (e.g. a street), or the whole *sign, of* "denotation" (Quelques points de sémiologie du cinéma," in *La Linguistique*, PUF, Paris, 1966, no 2, pp. 53-69). To put it a slightly different way, one might say that the explicit content of a film (and in particular its plot and dialogue) is only part of the *form* that expresses the implicit meaning.

To go back to Richards vs. *Cahiers:* the basic difference between the approaches boils down to an examination of the explicit vs. an analysis of the implicit. The amusing thing is that the starting points are somewhat similar; both methods, after all, are self-admittedly concerned with ideology. Thus the *Cahiers:* "One of the consequences of the 1929 economic crisis was that the major banking groups (...) strengthened their grip on the Hollywood firms which were having problems (...). 20th Century Fox (which produced *Young Mr Lincoln),* because of its links with Big Business, also supports the Republican Party (...).

"All this allows us to assume that in 1938-39, Fox, managed by the (also) Republican Zanuck, participated in its own way in the Republican offensive by producing a film on the legendary character Lincoln" (in English in *Screen, op. cit.* pp. 8-11). Richards in turn: "In its heyday (1920s to 1950s), the cinema was a large-scale industry, run by the bosses of the big companies. The great movie moguls, in the nature of their breed, were men of an Establishment turn of mind and the product they sanctioned consciously or unconsciously reflected this" *(Cambridge Review,* p. 10). Afterwards, of course, the methods diverge widely. The *Cahiers* are politically naive (why should a film about Lincoln automatically be part of the Republican strategy in 1939? In the French presidential election of 1974, De Gaulle was mentioned by the Communists more often than by Giscard d'Estaing. The very fact that, according to the *Cahiers* themselves, a Democrat-inspired *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* should have been made at the same time makes nonsense of the suggestion), but their actual textual reading is perceptive. They feel that "an artistic product cannot be linked to its socio-historical context according to a linear, expressive, direct causality (unless one falls into a reductionist historical determinism)" *(Screen,* p. 7). Which is exactly what Richards is doing. In spite of his proviso ("consciously *or unconsciously"),* he clearly adheres to the *reflection* theory, to the view that a particular ideology — imperialism — unambiguously expresses itself in a body of films.

What should be noted, however, is that the *Cahiers* and Jeffrey Richards are not in fact writing about the same films, or about the same type of film. In spite of their political awakening, the *Cahiers* have remained faithful to their established pantheon of American *auteurs:* John Ford *(Young Mr Lincoln),* Josef von Sternberg *(Morocco),* George Cukor *(Sylvia Scarlett)* . . . This is a cinema which is "classic" not just because it "has been described as based on analogical representation and linear narrative" *(Screen, p. 6),* but also because it is made up of "classics." The *Cahiers* may well have rejected the *auteur* theory; yet they keep on talking about "Ford's fiction," "Ford's morality and ideology," "a Fordian character" *(Screen,* p. 13; significantly, the original French text uses the adjective "fordien" in all three instances: *Cahiers* no 223, August-September 1970, p. 32).

Richards, of course, talks about Ford — and about *Young Mr Lincoln* in particular. But the reader has the impression that he only skims the surface, that the explicity ideological point of view from which "Ford's fiction" is looked at is narrow and superficial. On the contrary, Richards is convincing when writing about "The Cinema of Empire" or "The Cinema of Monarchy," that is to say about specific *genres* rather than *auteurs.* At this point one might be tempted to think that the *Cahiers* method and the Richards approach are not so much contradictory as complementary: the *Cahiers* in-depth analysis, with its combination of marxism, freudism and semiotics and detailed listing of "artefacts" being more convenient for genre films. One might therefore recall the very opposition outlined by *Cahiers* between "inscription" and "flat illustration" *(Screen, p. 39).* In *auteur* films such as Ford's, the ideological project is "inscribed" within a cinematic texture and this very process of "writing," of "inscribing," distorts, deviates, subverts the ideological project. In genre films, on the contrary, we are dealing with the "flat illustration" of the dominant ideology, the reflection theory obtains, and the Richards approach is valid, because it is, so to speak, sufficient.

Such a division of labour would be pleasant and reassuring; however, my feeling is that, while we may all practise it for the sake of convenience, its theoretical foundation is rather shaky. Most *auteur*-directed films are also, if not primarily, genre films, and to talk about a director "transcending the genre's limits," as the phrase used to go, does not take us very far. Sirk's weepies may well subvert their ideological project; yet they are archetypal of the genre. The *Cahiers* might answer that Sirk's case is similar to Ford's, that the very excesses of his writing bring his film close to parody perhaps. The difficulty is that there are countless bad "genre films" which are equally excessive in the way they are written. The difficulty is that the "chinks in the armour," rightly detected by *Cahiers* in *Young Mr Lincoln,* are also to be found in the most anonymous productions. I am quite sure that posters in the Paris or the London underground can be successfully submitted to Lacanian analysis; this will not prove them all to be works of art. Conversely, are we agreed that works of art *must* be complex and subject to internal strife? My point, quite modestly, is that both Richards's surface reading and the *Cahiers's* "scanning" are needed. Explicit meanings should not be discarded too lightly. Thus *Cahiers* had set out, among other things, to distinguish the relation of *Young Mr Lincoln* "to other films, themselves held in an intertextual space" *(Screen.* p. 6); here it would seem that Richards is stronger and more thorough. A properly intertextual reading of *Young Mr Lincoln* would certainly look in some detail at other Ford films; at other films about Lincoln; at other films starring Henry Fonda. Instead of which the actual analysis, in *Cahiers,* is satisfied with a brief mention of *Two Rode Together* and *Fort Apache,* as well as with one of Murnau's *Nosteratu.* In his chapter on Ford, Jeffrey Richards points to "strong links" between *Young Mr Lincoln* and *My Darling Clementine:* the same actor (Fonda), with identical "tiny details of character and habit," the same "Christ parallel," and the riding away at the end *(Visions of Yesterday,* p. 278). Personally, I should have thought that a discussion of Lincoln in the American cinema had to refer to D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* and that the concept of the "Law" in Ford's fiction should be examined in the light of *The Hurricane* as well as of *Young Mr Lincoln:* whereas Henry Fonda represents the Law that "separates Good from Evil" *(Screen,* p. 22), Raymond Massey is, in the former film, an incarnation of the perverted, repressive law — the letter rather than the spirit.

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In recent years we have heard much about (political) ideology, how it is subverted, how it creeps back in disguise. Perhaps we might hear a little about how aesthetic choices are still made even though they tend to remain hidden and implicit.

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